

National Land & Range Judging Contest

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

NEWS RELEASE

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, OACD Auxiliary, Sirloin Club of Oklahoma, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oklahoma Farm Credit, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, American Farmers & Ranchers, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, State Conservation Associations and Agriculture Groups across the nation.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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contact: Mark Harrison, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 405/521-6787 or Don Bartolina, Oklahoma County Conservation District, 405/245-232, or Steve Collier, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, 405/297-8938.

Fort Reno Agricultural Research Station hosts 58th National Land and Range Judging Contest

First Place Results Noted

Oklahoma City — One-hundred and sixty teams of teenage FFA and 4-H members competed in the 58th annual National Land and Range Judging Contest, held May 5-7, according to contest cochairman Trey Lam of Pauls Valley, Okla. Lam is president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor.

The Fort Reno Agricultural Research Station, U.S Department of Agriculture, hosted the event on its grounds near El Reno. The outdoor contest proceeded despite rainstorms blanketing most of the state early in the week. The contestants, who had competed in their own states and traveled to Oklahoma for the national competition, persevered despite wet and foggy weather.

Lam noted the idea of a land judging contest was invented by three Oklahoma conservationists in 1942. They decided which soil qualities could be judged and developed score cards to test skills. The idea caught on and Oklahoma City has been hosting the national contest since 1952.

The 4-H and FFA participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. Lam said the teams match skills in judging the adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and homesite construction. An adult category is provided to allow coaches, team alternates and others interested in soil to participate, but awards for the category were discontinued in 2008.

"The contestants take turns examining the soil in pits and trenches dug especially for the contest," Lam said. He noted that the skills the teens test at the contest involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resource conservation, home building and construction.

The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location. They then travel to the site, with a police escort, in a caravan of over 100 cars spanning several miles.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum when the day's freshly-tabulated results were announced. Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls welcomed all the participants at the banquet following the contest before the awards presentation began.

National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H.

In Land Judging, FFA competition, the Taylor County FFA, Grafton W. Va., chapter, won in the team category and the first place individual winner was Trent Sagramsningh, South Manatee, Bradenton, Fla. In the 4-H competition the Barbour Co 4-H, Belington, W. Va., chapter, was the winning team, and Allyssa Richie, North Miami 4-H, North Miami, Ind., was the individual winner.

In the Range Judging Contest, the Roland FFA, Roland, Okla., chapter won the FFA team competition, and Tanner Vaughan, Oklahoma Union FFA, South Coffeyville, Okla., took the first place individual FFA award. The Haakon/Jackson 4-H, Kadoka, S.D., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Brady Gifford, Pleasant Hope 4-H, Pleasant Hope, Mo, placed first in the individual category.

In Homesite Evaluation, the Southeast Manatee FFA, Bradenton, Fla., chapter won the FFA team competition, and Will Ritter, Gibson Southern FFA, Fort Branch, Ind., took the first place individual FFA award. The Barbour County 4-H, Belington, W. Va., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Kaitlyn Hargrove, Wilson County B 4-H, Lebanon, Tenn., placed first in the individual category.

Contest cochairman Trey Lam, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, presented the 2009 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award to Wadell Altom of Ardmore. Altom recently retired from the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation where he played an important role in that organization becoming a principal sponsor in the contest. Following the presentation of the honoree award, contest cochairman and co-emcee Russell Pierson, 97, was recognized with a standing ovation for participating in 57 of the 58 years of the contest

Lam credits the OACD Auxiliary, conservation district employees association and Oklahoma conservation districts for helping make the contest a success.

"I would like to thank all the conservation districts, businesses and associations who sponsored this educational contest," Lam said. "It takes a tremendous amount of time, effort and money to put on an annual event like this."

"Special thanks goes to the Fort Reno Agricultural Research Station for hosting the contest sites." Lam said, "Thanks also to the Noble Foundation for sponsoring the printed program and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for hosting the awards banquet, along with many other sponsors."

Lam said the Auxiliary of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts sponsored and hosted the Social Hour and Dance. Members of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Employees assist with the very vital contest tabulating, which takes place in the few hours between the end of the contest and the beginning of the awards banquet.

In addition to the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, contest cosponsors also include the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma Farm Credit, Sirloin Club of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, American Farmers & Ranchers, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and numerous other businesses and organizations.

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National Land& Range Judging (and Homesite) 2009 First Place

Top Team

Top Individual,

FFA

Land

Taylor County FFA, Grafton WV

Trent Sagramsningh, South Manatee, Bradenton FL

Range

Roland FFA, Roland, OK

Tanner Vaughan, Oklahoma Union FFA, South Coffeyville, OK

Homesite

Southeast Manatee FFA, Bradenton FL

Will Ritter, Gibson Southern FFA, Fort Branch, IN

4-H

Land

Barbour Co 4-H, Belington WV

Allyssa Richie, North Miami 4-H, North Miami IN

Range

Haakon/Jackson 4-H, Kadoka SD

Brady Gifford, Pleasant Hope 4-H, Pleasant Hope MO

Homesite

Barbour County 4-H, Belington, WV

Kaitlyn Hargrove, Wilson County B 4-H, Lebanon, Tenn.