

Setting Up and Holding a Range Evaluation Contest

Nov. 22, 2021

Contests are designed to share the workload between the Society for Range Management, NRCS, NRD, and Nebraska Extension. The “Local Committee” of NRD, NRCS and Extension should meet to decide, who will oversee which Range Judging tasks. Don’t think one person or one group needs to do all the work! Refer to the [Nebraska Range Judging Handbook](#) for contest assignments and responsibilities. The Handbook provides a wealth of information on setting up a contest and contest rules.

Agencies

The following are historically what has been done:

- **Society for Range Management (SRM) – State Range Judging Committee**
 - Planning for hosting regional and state contest
 - Coordinating contest dates
 - Assistance in planning of contest
 - Ordering and Mailing Score Cards to NRDs
 - Distributes Ribbons After the Contest
 - Training
- **Natural Resources Districts (NRD)**
 - Commonly host the contest
 - Send registration out to schools (might be different by region)
 - Sample Letter and Registration Form available at [Society for Range Management Website](#)
 - Collect participation fees, \$2.50/contestant (fee scale may differ by area)
 - After the contest, registration money should be sent to the Society for Range Management Committee Chair
 - Provide assistance with
 - Scoring
 - Tabulating
 - Staffing for the contest
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**
 - Assistance in staffing for the contest and scoring
 - Range specialists and conservationists help with:
 - Providing and Instruction & Rules for Contest (Table 20)
 - Selecting the field site
 - Obtaining needed permissions
 - Judging the range problems and fields for the contest
- **Nebraska Extension**
 - Assistance in staffing for the contest and scoring

August 1 (NRCS and Hosting NRD)

Select the site for the contest and obtain permission for access from the landowner. However, it is best to look for potential sites prior earlier in the summer. It is best to pick a location that was either not grazed in the current growing season, or grazed early in the growing season. A site with potential for ungrazed plants and seedheads present and high diversity of grasses, forbs, and shrubs is highly desirable. Seeded sites (i.e. CRP) should not be considered.

Give consideration to locations that are easily accessible by large activity/school busses and allow for plenty of room for parking and turn-around. Make arrangements/reservations for the gathering location, scoring room, and awards location. Generally, this is at a local community hall type facility. Make sure that there are adequate restroom facilities for the number of contestants expected.

September 1 (Hosting NRD, but check with Local Committee)

Recruit people to help with contest setup and the day of the contest. Utilize NRCS field office, NE Game and Parks, local NRD, Extension personnel, producers and others with good plant identification skills for help with field set up. Every effort should be made to secure plenty of help for the scoring room the day of the contest. If possible, have the runners stay in the score room once they bring in cards from the field. Often times, teachers are willing to be group leaders if you are short on help the day of the contest. Many of the schools have activities after the contest and appreciate having results ready shortly after lunch. Below is a suggestion for the number of helpers needed the day of the contest based on pre-registrations.

| | Number of Contestants | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | <100 | 100-150 | 150-200 | 200-300 | >300 |
| Contest Official 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Station Judges | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Group Leaders | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Time Keeper | * | * | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Runners | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Scorers | 10 | 15 | 20 | 20+ | 25+ |
| Total | 22 | 28 | 42 | 42+ | 47+ |
| Plant Lines | 2 | 3 to 4 | 4 to 5 | 4 to 5 | 6 min |
| Groups of Contestants | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 8 |

3 Weeks Prior to the Contest (Hosting NRD)

Send out registration information to the schools. A list of ag instructors can be found at <http://www.neaged.org/teacher-directory.html>. Contest participation isn't exclusive to schools with an ag program. You are welcome to invite local schools that have a strong science and/or environmental education program to participate as well. Pre-registration should be a requirement and a deadline for registrations to be returned approximately 5 days or more prior to the contest is encouraged.

Begin to get cards sorted and stapled for the contest. Each contestant will get two copies of Card 1 and one copy of Card 2. The cards will be stapled together. You can write the contestant's number on the cards in pen, or after you have all your registrations entered in the scoring program, you can print labels for the cards. Contestant numbers used on the cards must match contestant numbers in the scoring program. The matching is critical!

2 Weeks Before Contest (*NRCS and Hosting NRD*)

- Prepare Station 8 Ranch Plan and Station 9 Questions. Files of questions and ranch map/problems from previous contests are available from the State Range Judging Committee as samples. Answers to all questions should be found in the Handbook. Have your state committee representative review the Plan and Questions for consistency and state committee guidance. Once everyone agrees that the ranch map/problem and questions are acceptable, copies should be made to allow for 1 per contestant plus some extras. Do not copy Station 8 and Station 9 on the same piece of paper.
- It is also suggested at this time, copies of the appropriate Guide for Determining Range Condition for the zone where the contest is located (Table 2 on pages 10-13 of the Nebraska Range Judging Handbook be copied, along with Worksheet for Determining Range Condition (Figure 15 on page 21 of the Handbook). Each contestant should have 1 Guide and 3 Worksheets. These can be copied front-to-back and should be stapled together.
- Check your list of volunteers to see if there is someone familiar with the Excel scoring program used to tabulate results. Contact the State Range Judging Committee if you need assistance.
- Make assignments for all the great people who have volunteered to help with the contest. Provide times and locations to meet for specific tasks. Let them know if they need to pack a lunch or if lunch will be provided for field help. A dollar or so can be added to the base registration fee of \$2.50 to help cover meals and room rental.

Registrations from Schools (*Hosting NRD*)

As registrations are received from the schools, contestant names and teams should be entered into the scoring program. It is recommended that for larger contests that two scoring programs be utilized, one for junior participants and one for senior participants and adults/professionals. It is also recommended that cards should be labeled with contestant names and numbers as they are entered into the scoring program. It is essential that contestant number is identical to the number in the scoring program for each contestant. Prepare a packet for each school that contains contest cards (two of Card 1 and one of Card 2) that includes contestant names, team groupings, and contestant group.

1-2 Days Before (*Society for Range Management, NRCS and Hosting NRD*)

Set up the contest location. Some contest equipment may be available by Area. Contact the State Range Judging Committee Chair for information about available equipment (coffin) and location.

Equipment needed is listed below:

- Pin Flags (2-4 colors), 24 of each color
- Station Signs (Numbered 1-8)
- Clippers (4-6)
- Plant ID Books
- Range Judging Handbook
- Key for Plant ID Stations
- Blank copy of Card 1 and Card 2
- Lath or Step-In Posts (16) for range sites, 8 for Station Signs
- Ribbon/Flagging (2 rolls)
- Shovel/Sharp Shooter/Post Hole Diggers
- Soil Book
- Bottles of HCl and Water (3 of each, minimum)
- Key for Range Site Stations
- Pencil or Pen

Prepare the contest keys and score cards once the site has been set up. It is suggested that the Card 1 be cut out to a key to lay over the contestant card. This aids in ease of scoring.

Make a site map and determine the contest rotation between each station – See Table 16 for examples. Designate parking areas for helper vehicles and school busses and vans. Provide copies for each of the volunteers that are assisting in the field.

Divide copies/handouts (Station 8 ranch map, Station 9 questions, and packet of site guide and worksheets) for use by the contestants in the field according to the numbers of groups that you will have during your contest. Package them, along with some spare pencils, for either your group leaders or site leaders, which ever works best for your contest. These documents will be handed out in the field the day of the contest, not at registration time.

Obtain some cash to make change for schools that pay on-site the day of the contest. Some schools will pay by check, some will pay by cash, and some schools will have changes that may desire a refund.

Contact local media and invite them to cover the contest event.

Print a list of pre-registered teams. Ag instructors will make changes to teams the day of the contest, so it is easier if you make the changes on a list during registration the day of the contest, and then enter them in to the computer prior to the start of the scoring.

Morning of the Contest (*NRCS and Hosting NRD*)

- Inspect the field to ensure that flags are still in the proper locations and plants haven't blown away or been grazed on overnight. Put up station signs. Pull a clean profile from each of the range site holes. Place water and HCl bottles at each range site.
- Set up registration area. Have cards sorted by school. Remember your list of teams to record changes on.
- Set Up Scoring Room and Computers and Printer(s).
 - Read Score Room Guide
- Set up contest banner either at the registration and awards area or in the field. Many schools will take pictures with this banner, so if you set it up in the field, it's nice to bring it back to the awards area.
- Provide instructions to students. See Contestant Instructions (Table 20).
- Enjoy the day and remember to thank the schools for participating and the volunteers for helping.

After the Contest

- Clean up the contest field site. Return any borrowed equipment and the contest banner to the Society for Range Management.
- Send copies of your scoring results to State Committee Chair. They will be placed on the range judging website for schools to access. No results/awards will be released the day of the contest. The Society for Range Management takes care of distributing ribbons later.
- Send registration fees collected to the Society for Range Management Committee Chair.
- Prepare and send out press releases, as desired.