

Setting up and holding a Land Evaluation Contest

June 18, 2014

Plan

The Coordinator for the Vocational Agricultural Instructors (FFA) needs to determine the approximate location and dates for the regional and state contests as early as possible. Instructors should apply for hosting the regional contest by July 1. Approximate numbers of participants should be determined at this time. These steps should allow the coordinator to contact and make arrangements with the support agencies; University of Nebraska, Natural Resource Districts, Natural Resource Conservation Service and others. The earlier these agencies are contacted, the easier it is for them to make arrangements for staffing, contest site preparation (field and meeting area), and procuring adequate contest materials. Contests are best if scheduled during the middle of the week, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. This allows the pits to be dug on Monday for a Tuesday contest or the pits to be filled on Friday after a Thursday contest. The pits should not remain open any longer than necessary.

Agencies

The following are historically what has been done.

Vocational agriculture instructors - Planning for hosting regional and state contest, coordinating contest dates, contestants.

Conservation and Survey Division, University of Nebraska - Assistance in planning of contest, scorecards, training.

Natural Resource Districts - Commonly host the contest and provide assistance in scoring, tabulating, field site preparation and staffing for the contest.

Natural Resources Conservation Service - Assistance in staffing for the contest. Soil scientists and conservationists help with selecting the field site, obtaining needed permissions, making 1-calls, and judging the soil pits and fields for the contest. They need to know at least 30-90 days ahead of the contest in order to plan their schedules.

Other organizations and agencies may provide staffing assistance or other services that might be needed.

Field site

Field site selection and securing permission for the contest and pits is usually coordinated by the local NRCS soil scientist and conservationist. The site should have reasonable access for vehicles, usually school busses or vans and a safe area for parking and assembling the contestants prior to and at conclusion of the field judging

Select four sites within a reasonable walking distance. It is preferable that the sites be about the same walking time between them.

A pit should be dug at each site to show the soil profile and allow contestants to observe the natural soil in place. Modification of the soil profile is discouraged. The profile should be lighted by the sun during the late morning. **The pits should be large enough for several contestants to enter at any one time, not deeper than 5 feet. One end of the pit should be stepped out or shaped to provide easy access.** The side of the pit opposite the soil profile should be sloped to a stable grade to prevent trapping contestants should the pit collapse.

Soils for the contest should be chosen so they fit into one of the soil classifications given in the official Capability Chart for the area of the contest.

An 'official profile' area about one foot wide is prepared on the profile face of the pit and marked with flags at the surface, a string may be added along the sides of the area. Contestants are not allowed to disturb this area and must make their observations on either side of the reserve area. A sample of adequate size is obtained from the surface layer and placed in a container labeled 'Surface layer'. Another sample is obtained from the subsoil or most restrictive layer for permeability determination and is placed in a container labeled 'Control section'. These samples are used by the contestants for determining surface texture, subsoil/control section texture and permeability. Official determinations should be made from these samples. Water should be provided for moistening the samples for texture determination. If the soil profile is dry a spray bottle of water may be provided for misting the soil profile. **Soil spatulas/trowels should be provided at each field site so contestants may use them to examine the soil profile outside of the designated profile face.**

The official field site is marked by flags and should be at least 100 feet square. This field is not considered to have any conservation practices, such as terraces installed. Any pre-existing practices are ignored in prescribing proper practices. The only existing features used in judging are gullies, weeds, trees and brush which may be present on the site.

Slope stakes are established within reasonable proximity to the official field. These stakes should be driven to the same height and should be placed with the normal slope of the land. Runoff should be expected to flow generally from the upper to the lower stake. The slope stakes should be placed 100 feet apart or can be placed 50 feet apart with instructions to the contestants that 50 feet is used at this site.

An official key should be completed and submitted to the official scoring agency the day before the contest if possible, so scoring keys can be completed in advance. Assign the point values to the various answers relative to its importance.

Official Field Instruction cards should be prepared for each site and include the site number, thickness of the original topsoil, water table depths, flooding and ponding information, soil test data, deposition soil factors, and any other factors. Suggested cards are available on the website.

General contest rules

1. No talking or comparing cards.
2. No clipboards, bubble vials, tape measures or other measuring devices are allowed.
3. Contestants can have the following pieces of equipment; a. writing instrument (pencils are preferred, especially in wet weather), b. knives are NOT allowed at the contest, c. contest cards, d. capability chart.
4. The land evaluation handbook and the most current capability chart for the area will be used to resolve contest differences and should be used in setting up and conducting the contests. The latest information will be available on the official Land Evaluation Web Site, it is the obligation of the instructors, site judges and others to make sure they are using the most current information. Changes will not be made to the 'official' site within 30 days of the first contest for a given year.
5. Contestants are only allowed to take notes on site instructions (ie, soil depth, erosion and slope). Other written information on scorecards and capability charts are not allowed.

Conducting the contest

At the State Contest Registration, site buckets with representative samples of soil textures in the contest area should be provided for contestants to examine before the contest. Register teams by consecutive numbers and team members by using letters A, B, C, D or consecutive numbering system following the Land Master scoring system. Prepare cards ahead of time by having team cards and capability charts separated and placed in a large envelope labeled for each school. Contestants will receive scorecards and capability charts after arriving at the judging site. After receiving contest materials and instructions from site judge, the Contestants and Adults will be divided into 5 rotational groups. Contestants with the letter A or number 1 will go to site 1, B or number 2 to site 2, C or number 3 to site 3 and D or number 4 to site 4. The Adult and previous winners group will wait in the 5th rotational group and move to site 1 when it is rotation time. Allow 20 minutes to evaluate each site. Before judging a site, contestants will be given field note information from the field instructor. Use a signal, such a car horn from a central location that can be heard at all sites for timing. Cards are collected by the site judge as contestants finish or when time is expired. Someone should be designated to collect all the cards and return them to the central point for scoring, if the distance is such, two people may be needed.

Scoring and grading

Categories on the scorecard carry varying values depending on the judges' evaluation of its relative importance. The total possible points on each site are 100, with 50 in part 1 and 10 in part 2 and 40 for part 3. Each answer must be legibly marked to get credit for the answer. Only one answer per item will be counted, if multiple blocks are marked in part 1 or part 2, no credit will be given (erasures and changed answers are ok). Only one block is to be marked in part 3, section A. All applicable blocks need to be marked in part 3, sections B through D.

The points will be assigned to each correct answer by the official who scores the official score cards for the contest, usually the soil scientist assisting with the contest. They will use their judgment to assign values to each answer according to how important they feel the determination is to evaluating the site.

In scoring part 3, using the total number of blocks that should be checked, count down the contestant's card that many check marks and draw a line to stop counting the score. Then calculate the points earned from correct check marks above that line.

(Example 1, there are supposed to be 6 check marks in part 3. The contestant checks 4 blocks in section A, and 5 more in section B, and 3 in section D. The scoring will only look at the first 6 marks going down the card. So they will likely get credit for one check in section A, but would only have a chance at getting 2 correct in section B for credit. The extra 6 marks down the card are not scored, even if they were correct answers.)

Using a photocopy on clear mylar (overhead projection film/transparency) with appropriate windows cut for scoring allows the scoring to be quickly accomplished.

The use of the computer spreadsheet allows quick tabulation when the scoring and entry is completed. A master template will be provided.

Method of breaking ties needs to be announced before starting the contest. This is how ties have been handled in some past contests, but alternative methods may be used.

In the case of a tie in the team score, use the score of the 4th individual. If one team only has 3 members then the team with the 4th member is the winner. If a tie still exists then use scores from site 1, then site 2,3 and 4. If there is still a tie, use scores from part 1 then part 2. If still tied, names are drawn from a hat for the winner. This same procedure is used for individual ties.

Awards

Area Contests - Individual ribbons are given to contestants in descending order of scores (Purple, Blue, Red, and White) according to the number of ribbons based on the previous years' participation. Area Team Ribbons are awarded one ribbon per team in order of descending scores (Purple, Blue, Red, White) for each team. Area Plaques are presented to the top scoring team from each team that qualifies to participate in the State contest based off of the number of participating schools. One Plaque per school will be awarded.

State Qualifying Numbers: Less than 3 schools- 1, 3-4 schools-2, 5-9 schools- 3, 10-14 schools- 4, 14-19 schools-5, 20 or more- 6.

Contestants that place in the top 10 individuals of an Area but are not on a state qualifying team may compete as an individual at the State Contest. They will be awarded individual ribbons but their score will not count on any team scores. Instructors must notify the State chairman by the Friday following the final scheduled Area contest in order to compete, so the State scoring sheet and State scorecards can be completed.

Contest Staffing

Following is a list of staff people needed to carry out a contest. Numbers of ‘*’ staff may need to be increased if more contestants are present. **Agricultural Educators/Teachers may be requested to assist at area contests as Group Leaders or Field Foreman.**

Field location

Site judge* - one at each of the 4 sites, give field instructions, monitors the contestants, collects scorecards

Timer - one, centrally located to sites, preferably in a position to see when contestants have reached each site, signals start of judging and end of judging time. Twenty (20) minutes is allowed for judging. Travel time between sites will vary and judging should not be started until all contestants reach their next site.

Card carrier - usually 2, one collects first set of cards and takes to scoring location and returns to field for 3rd set, second person collects second set and returns them to scoring location. Second person can return for 4th set or they can be returned by another official from the field location.

Group leader - 4, one for each group (A, B, C, & D), leads the groups from one site to the next.

Field foreman - gives preliminary instructions when contestants arrive at the field site, may announce answers

Clean-up* - pick up signs, water containers, dispose of soil samples/boxes, pickup area

Someone* to make sure the pits are filled in properly and if needed reseeded. Thank cooperator.

Scoring location

Registration* - 2-4 - check registration forms, changes, etc

Computer entry* - 2 (depends on computer resources), enter contestant names, scores

Scoring* - 4 per site if possible. Scorecards are scored by 2 people before being entered, one scoring in red, one in blue.

Card sorter* - 1-2, sort cards by contestant numbers for easier computer entry, sort cards after scores are entered for easier access if needed for rechecking or ties.

Equipment needs

adding machines/calculators
red and blue pencils for scoring and checking
official score sheets

Other items

Plan for refreshments for the contest staffing people.

Materials needed for field site preparation

1. 16 flags to mark corners of the field to judge
2. 8 lathe for slope stakes
3. 8 flags for marking official profile
4. 4 stakes with large numbers (1-4) to mark the field numbers
5. 4 signs for group leaders (A, B, C, D)
6. 8 small boxes (white trash bags) for soil samples (Surface layer and control section)
7. 4 water bottles for wetting samples
8. Soil Spatulas/trowels to be used by contestants to pick soil for profile in the pit at each field site.
9. 4 official score cards
10. 4 official field instruction cards
11. At the State contest registration site – A set of buckets with representative samples of soil textures for that contest area for contestants to examine before the contest

Suggested instructions to contestants, at start

1. Check your contest cards - make sure you have

4 contest cards with your contestant number

Summary card for your record

Capability chart

Pencil

2. Contestants can have the following pieces of equipment; a. writing instrument (pencils are preferred, especially in wet weather), b. contest cards, c. capability chart.

3. You will have 20 minutes to judge each site.

4. Results will be given at the end of the contest (weather permitting in the field).

5. No talking between contestants. Cards may be taken up if this rule is violated.

6. Contestants are only allowed to take notes on site instructions (ie, soil depth, erosion and slope). Other written information on scorecards and capability charts are not allowed.

7. You will divide up into groups. Please move with your group leader.