

# 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.

	<b>Number of Contestants</b>				
	<b>&lt;100</b>	<b>100-150</b>	<b>150-200</b>	<b>200-300</b>	<b>&gt;300</b>
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.

Table 16. Two suggested judging contest rotation schedules.

Letters refer to groups of contestants

Suggestion 1 (Accommodates 4 groups of contestants)								
Time Period	Station 1: Plants 1–6	Station 2: Plants 7–12	Station 3: Plants 13–18	Station 4: Plants 18–24	Station 5: Ecological Site	Station 6: Ecological Site	Station 7: Ecological Site	Station 8: Ranch Problem
					Sim. Index	Sim. Index	Sim. Index	
					Use	Use	Use	
1st	A & E	B & F	C & G	D & H				
2nd	B & F	A & E	D & H	C & G				
3rd	C & G	D & H	A & E	B & F				
4th	D & H	C & G	B & F	A & E				
5th	All groups stay in place for Station 9–Test Questions							
6th					A & E	B & F	C & G	D & H
7th					B & F	A & E	D & H	C & G
8th					C & G	D & H	A & E	B & F
9th					D & H	C & G	B & F	A & E

Suggestion 2 (Accommodates 8 groups of contestants)								
Time Period	Station 1: Plants 1–6	Station 2: Plants 7–12	Station 3: Plants 13–18	Station 4: Plants 18–24	Station 5: Ecological Site	Station 6: Ecological Site	Station 7: Ecological Site	Station 8: Ranch Problem
					Sim. Index	Sim. Index	Sim. Index	
					Use	Use	Use	
1st	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2nd	B	A	D	C	F	E	H	G
3rd	C	D	A	B	G	H	E	F
4th	D	C	B	A	H	G	F	E
5th	All groups stay in place for Station 9–Test Questions							
6th	E	F	G	H	A	B	C	D
7th	F	E	H	G	B	A	D	C
8th	G	H	E	F	C	D	A	B
9th	H	G	F	E	D	C	B	A

\* Stations 8 and 9 can be combined or Station 9 can be run as a separate station with the entire group of contestants staying at their current location and given the test questions at one time following the fourth time period, allowing about 10 minutes for test completion. Test sheets must be distributed to all stations to hand out at the appropriate time if the test is given to all contestants after the fourth time period.

Stations 1–4 (Plants): Range Judging Scorecards will be turned in after Time Periods 2 and 4.

Stations 5–9 (Range Sites and Problems): All five time periods are located on one scorecard, turn in scorecard upon completion. Groups will be provided an appropriate range condition guide; this must be handed in before rotation to Stations 1–4.

Table 20: General Contest Rules and Instructions (to be read to contestants prior to contest)

- You are a guest on this land so be respectful of the landowner.
- Make certain that you have three scorecards and make certain that your name, contestant number, and school are written on all three scorecards.
- No talking during the contest is allowed. This means no talking from the time you get off the bus at the contest site until the contest is completed and all scorecards have been turned in. If you do not observe this rule, your scorecards will be pulled by the station judge or your group leader.
- Transfer all answers from handouts to the scorecards. Only the scorecards will be scored. Other materials will be handed in but not scored.
- Even though you are a member of a team, you are expected to do your own work. Do not compare answers with other contestants.
- No clipboards are allowed on the contest site.
- No calculators are allowed on the contest site.
- No cell phones are allowed on the contest site.
- No keeper scorecards, notes pages, or other methods of recording answers for later use are allowed. Instructors may be allowed to keep a copy of all contest materials handed out at the site.
- Use only pencil or black or blue pens.
- Do not write anything on any part of the scorecards except your answers. The presence of notes or other handwritten information on the scorecards will result in disqualification of the contestant.
- Notes or math calculations may be written on the ecological site guide, similarity index worksheet, ranch problem handout, and/or question handouts.
- The time allowed at each station is 10 minutes.
- Do not touch the flagged plants. You may touch or pick unmarked plants in the area to help in plant identification.
- There are multiple examples of each plant flagged; please spread out among the plants. You may look at all of the flagged plants to assist with identification.
- Each station will have a station judge; if you have questions about which plant is flagged or other questions about the station, please ask the station judge.
- Your group leader will lead you from station to station. Stay with your leader and do not move from station to station until directed to by your group leader.

## Range Judging Score Room Guide - Updated September 2021

Due to recent NRCS guidelines, we are unable to join you in the Range Judging (RJ) scoreroom this year. While I am greatly saddened to miss the hustle and excitement, I am grateful for others who have stepped in. The FFA chapters are excited to have this opportunity- so "Thank you!"

There are two YouTube videos available. One is for scorers coming to the scoreroom, showing how to score cards. The other is to help the score room leader prepare for the contest.

Scorers- How to Score Range Judging Cards

<https://youtu.be/wA-zMtsaqy4>

Preparing for the Scoreroom

<https://youtu.be/QNHjr-L1nhQ>

Have the newest edition (July 2016) of the [RJ Handbook](#) with you. Read the contest rules, but realize some of the chapter is geared towards the field setup (Chapter 8, page 31). "Grading/scoring" and "breaking ties" are on page 40.

Break your scoring team into various positions:

- Card runner (brings cards from the contest to the scoreroom)
- Card A and B scorers
- Card C scorers (use more experienced scorers)
- Towards the end, scorers will re-add the deductions to ensure the points are correct.
  - Circle the score (at the top of the card), once it has been double-checked.
- Someone can pick up the cards, which the score has been double-checked.
- Sort the double-checked cards into piles in numerical order by juniors and seniors.
- Have one (maybe two) people enter the scores into the Excel spreadsheet.
  - Save often.

You may feel harsh when grading cards, but remember many youth are just learning range identification. Youth will see their scores, but not the range judging cards.

Be consistent as a scoring team. The different between placings can come down to one point.

- Plan on double checking math.

Towards the end of the contest, another person can add up the deductions, to ensure it matches.

- Circle the score (at the top of the card), once it is double checked.

If you can't read it, it is wrong. I'm not asking for perfect penmanship, just that you can read the answer.

There are 3 cards per student.

\*There are two cards (blue- Card A, and green- Card B) where the youth identify rangeland plants by their common names and attributes.

\*The plant name is worth 5 points.

- The plant name needs to be complete.

Example: Big Bluestem. Not: Bluestem. Not: Big Blue.

- Be easy on the spelling. Can you sound it out? Then it is correct.



- Sometimes, plant families are lumped together under one name.
  - Gayfeathers, goldenrods, and gromwells are examples.
  - If the student is more detailed (i.e. dotted gayfeather), the detailed name will need to match the plant species on the line.
  - Check with the RJ official, if a student is more detailed.

\*Each plant characteristic is worth 1 point.

- The wrong letter is incorrect.
- If the space is blank (or dashed) on the key, then a letter is incorrect.
- If there was a letter on the key, and the student left it blank, it is incorrect.
- If there is a “sedge” or “rush” decide if you want to include R or B, or R/B, or V for the growth form.

It is listed as V (variable) in the RJ handbook, but V is not listed on the card.

- Plant characteristics are listed in the RJ handbook. There have been error on the keys before, so feel free to check in the RJ handbook (starting on page 42).

\*The last card (beige, Card C) has several stations listed. This card is more difficult to grade, so more experienced scorers may want to score the beige card.

\*Each part of the stations are worth different points, so be sure you double check your math.

\*The ecological site names need to be exact.

- A “sandy” site is different than a “sands” site.

\*There is a  $\pm 10\%$  range on Stations 5, 6, and 7 for “similarity index” and “degree of use.”

- The keys should include the range. The student’s answer needs to fit within the range. For example, if degree of use on Station 5 is 50%, the range would be 40-60%. 39% would be incorrect (out of the range).

\*On the Station 8 (stocking rate), give  $\pm 1$  point leeway on the Available AUM’s, Needed AUM’s, and Difference in AUM’s.

- If the difference in AUM’s is negative, a minus sign is not required.

If -35 AUMs is the difference, then 35 AUM or -35 AUM is correct.

Score Cards will NOT be returned to schools or available for instructors to look at afterwards but would recommend that the score cards be held onto for a week after scoring in case an issue arises. After that the cards can be destroyed or recycled.

**Enter scores for each card into the Excel spreadsheet for scoring provided by the State Committee. Do not do any sorting, placings, or assigning of ribbons. Email the spreadsheet back to (insert email here). The State Committee will do all sorting, assigning of places and ribbons, and will email back to the contact person for your contest that sent this spreadsheet.**

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact

Kristin L Dickinson  
 308-254-4507 x. 3  
 308-249-2766 (cell)  
[kristin.dickinson@usda.gov](mailto:kristin.dickinson@usda.gov)

Bethany Johnston  
 308-346-4399 ext 104  
[Bethany.johnston@usda.gov](mailto:Bethany.johnston@usda.gov)