

News

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FFA Rangeland Judgers Compete in Akron

By Ben Berlinger, Society for Range Management, Youth Activities Chair

Future Farmers of America (FFA) students and their advisors from high schools across eastern Colorado arrived at the Washington County fairgrounds in Akron October 7th. The purpose was to compete in a rangeland plant identification exercise and participate in judging the soundness of the rangeland. This **state-level competition** attracted 130 students representing 15 FFA Chapters from as far away as Merino & Otis to the north and Hoehne & Pritchett to the south.

Team awards and top scoring individuals were recognized at the awards ceremony which was held at the conclusion of the competition. The **Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM)** sponsored the individual honors while **nineteen of the Conservation Districts** across eastern Colorado and some local business sponsored the team plaques and provided a breakfast snack and a cafeteria lunch for the participants. **The Washington County & Cope Conservation Districts provided the local coordination for the activity. Carolyn Payne, Conservation District Manager in Akron, handled the local arrangements for the two Conservation Districts.** Colorado Conservation Districts have always united to provide support for natural resources education for our youth in Colorado.

The Colorado Section SRM individual awards were presented to **Ashley Yergert of Kim FFA Chapter** for the high score on the combined site judging & plant identification (88% score); and to **Micah Cane of Pritchett FFA** for second place honors with his combined score of 86% correct. **McCrae Rider of Burlington FFA** was recognized as the top individual for the plant identification part of the contest. He scored 93% correct in this exercise requiring the identification of 50 rangeland plants and their characteristics. Ashley was presented with a \$200 check from the Colorado Section SRM along with her plaque.

The winning high schools recognized at this year's state competition included: **Kim FFA Chapter, 1st Place Gold Team; Lone Star FFA Chapter, 2nd Place Gold Team; Crowley County FFA Chapter, 3rd Place Silver Team; Stratton FFA Chapter, 4th Place Silver Team; Fowler FFA Chapter, 5th Place Bronze Team; Burlington FFA Chapter, 6th Place Bronze Team.** In the beginning rangeland judging class **Merino FFA Chapter** place first, **Akron FFA Chapter** was second, and **Lone Star FFA Chapter** placed third.

The FFA rangeland judging contest is divided into two parts. The native plant identification involves the naming of rangeland plants common to eastern Colorado together with rating important plant characteristics such as life span, grazing response, and palatability for cattle. The second part of the contest takes place in the field and requires the students to judge the condition of two different rangeland sites. Here the students must determine the plant composition of each site, the range condition compared to the reference plant community, the suggested stocking rate, and range trend. Finally, based on their evaluation of the existing plant community, each student must select the appropriate management practice (or suite of practices) that would be recommended to the land owner for improvement of the rangeland resource and livestock performance.

The CO Section SRM & Colorado's Conservation Districts congratulate all of the Colorado high school youth who participated in this year's rangeland judging exercise and wish them continued success with their accomplishments to learn more about the conservation of our natural resources.

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Eastern Colorado State FFA Rangeland Judging career Development Exercise (CDE) held in Washington County. There were 130 FFA students participating in this year's contest representing 15 schools from all over eastern Colorado. This picture shows one group of students judging a Sands ecological site, one of two ecological sites located near Akron. The participating teams were Kim, Lone Star, Crowley County, Stratton, Fowler, Burlington, Prichett, Hoehne, Rocky Ford, Arickaree, Merino, Akron, New Raymer, Briggsdale, and Otis. The order of schools listed above is the placement of the team based on the three highest scoring team members.



FFA rangeland judging CDE. Students are judging the second of two ecological sites located near Akron. The judging consisted of properly identifying the site, determining the range condition & trend, and then recommending certain management practices that could be implemented. Here the students are judging a Loamy ecological site.



A group of FFA students during the rangeland plant identification contest.



Rangeland plant identification involved learning the common plant names and characteristics of each plant.



The Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) presented the high scoring individuals with recognition for their outstanding achievement. From top to bottom pictures are Ashley Yergert, high combined score for both site judging & plant identification; Micah Crane, second high combined score; and McCrae Rider, high score on plant identification.