

# **Field Site Preparation Checklist and Suggested Timeline for Setting Up a Range Judging Contest**

Please refer to the Nebraska Range Judging Handbook

<https://extensionpubs.unl.edu/publication/ec150/2025/pdf/view/ec150-2025.pdf>

for suggestions for contest assignments and responsibilities. The Handbook provides a wealth of information on setting up a contest and the rules to follow during the contest.

Contests are designed to share the workload between the State Range Judging Committee, NRCS, NRD, and Nebraska Extension. Don't think one person or one group needs to do all the work!

## **August 1**

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. Consider 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, registration area, and scoring room. 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**

Recruit people to help with contest setup and the day of the contest. Utilize NRCS field office, NE Game & Parks, local NRD, UNL-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, instructors are willing to be group leaders if you are short on help the day of the contest. 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***

Send out registration information to the schools, please get your invitation letter and registration details sent to Kristy King ([Kristy.king@usda.gov](mailto:Kristy.king@usda.gov)) and she will send out the registration information via email to the Ag Ed Directory which will encompass all schools with an ag/FFA program. 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 and you can still send out the registration info to all the local schools within your contest area if you desire. 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 1 copy of each score card (A, B, and C). 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 into the scoring program, you can print labels for the cards. Contestant numbers used on the cards must match contestant numbers in the excel sheet scoring program. This is critical! **\*\*Please note that with the new on-line registration the excel sheet for scoring and labels for the score cards will be completed and emailed to you\*\***

### ***2 weeks before contest***

Prepare Station 8 Ranch Plan and Station 9 Questions. The SRJC has prepared a list of questions for station #9 that the local committee can choose 10 questions from for their contest. The SRJC contact for each contest oversee developing the ranch map problem for station #8, they can coordinate this with the local committee if someone on the local committee wants to develop the map, but it needs to be reviewed by the SRJC contact. 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 MLRA Guide for Determining Similarity Index for the zone where the contest is located, along with Worksheet for Determining Similarity Index be made (these are found in the Range Judging Handbook, Tables 2-14 & Table 18). Each contestant should have 1 MLRA Guide and 3 Worksheets. These can be copied front-to-back and should be stapled together. **\*\*MLRA guide must be printed from the most recent version of the NE Range Judging handbook on-line\*\***

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. Please try to have a score room official, this person needs to have experience with range judging and the scoring process, but they will help answer any questions that may come up while scoring cards.

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.

### **As registrations are received from schools**

As registrations are received from the schools, contestant names should be entered into the scoring program. 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. **Again, if utilizing the on-line registration, the scoring program will be filled out and emailed to you along with the labels for the score cards. If allowing on-line and traditional registration you will have to add in any traditional registrations or enter them on-line yourself.**

Prepare a packet for each school that contains contest cards that includes contestant names and contestant group. Can also have invoices ready for each school if desired.

It is recommended that for larger contests that 2 computers be utilized, one for junior participants, one for senior participants and adults/professionals so that more than 1 person can be entering in scores.

### **1-2 Days before contest**

Set up the contest location. Equipment needed is listed below:

- Pin Flags (2-4 colors) 24 of each color
- Markers to # flags
- Station signs (numbered 1-8)
- Clippers (4-6)
- Plant ID Books
- Range Judging Handbook
- Blank copy of all 3 score cards
- Lath or step-in post 16 for eco sites & 8 for the station signs
- Ribbon/flagging (2 rolls) for the eco sites
- Shovel, sharp shooter, or post hole diggers
- Soils Book
- Bottles of HCL and water (3 of each, minimum)
- Key for Ecological Site Stations
- Pencil or Pen

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

Prepare the contest keys and score cards once the site has been set up. It is suggested that the Cards A & B 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. 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 MLRA guide and SI 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, whichever 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.

### **Morning of the contest**

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.

Set up scoring room and computers. Will need red pens and calculators for score room volunteers. Most folks can use their smartphones for calculators.

Set up contest banner either at the registration area or in the field at the contest site. Many schools will take pictures with this banner. Please reach out to your state committee contact to see if there is a banner available in your area.

Provide instructions to students either at the registration site or at the contest site prior to the contest starting (Table 20 in the Range Judging Handbook), usually done by the contest official.

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 to the State Committee. Return the contest banner to the State Committee.

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 ([Kristin.dickinson@usda.gov](mailto:Kristin.dickinson@usda.gov)) as soon as possible.** The State Committee will do all sorting, assignment of places and ribbons, and will email results back to the contact person. Many schools wait to register teams for the state contest until they have the results of the Area contest. **Unless problems arise, the score spreadsheet should be emailed to Kristin no later than the next morning following the day of the contest**

Prepare and send out press releases, as desired.

Please reach out to your State Range Judging Committee liaison for your contest if you have any questions regarding preparation for the contest.