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NEWS RELEASE

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El Reno hosted 59th National Land and Range Judging Contest

First Place Results Noted

Oklahoma City — Six hundred and fifty teenage FFA and 4-H members competed in the 59th annual National Land and Range Judging Contest, held May 4-6, according to contest cochairman Trey Lam of Pauls Valley, Okla. Lam is president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor. The El Reno Federal Corrections Institution hosted the event on its FCI Farms near El Reno on May 6. Redlands Community College hosted luncheon for participants at its Darlington Farm Agricultural Education near the contest site. Total registration for the event exceeded 860 with coaches, sponsors, officials and group leaders in addition to the contestants.

Lam noted the idea of a land judging contest was invented by three Oklahoma conservationists in 1942. They decided which soil qualities could be judged and developed score cards to test skills. The idea caught on and Oklahoma has been hosting the national contest since 1952. Oklahoma City serves as headquarters for registration and other activities, with the actual contest held somewhere near the metro area.

The 4-H and FFA participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. Lam said the teams match skills in judging the adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and homesite construction.

The first two days of the three-day event offer contestants opportunities to visit nearby practice sites to get acquainted with Oklahoma soils and plants with information available from soil experts. A dance in the evening of the second day gives the participants a chance to socialize with other teens from across the nation.

The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location. They then travel to the site, with a police escort, in a caravan of over 100 cars spanning several miles.

"The contestants take turns examining the soil in pits and trenches dug especially for the contest," Lam said. He noted that the skills the teens test at the contest involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resource conservation, home building and construction.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum when the day's freshly-tabulated results were announced. Jeanette Nance, liaison to Gov. Brad Henry, welcomed all the participants and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls offered the invocation. Kendell Brashears, executive director of the Oklahoma FFA Foundation, emceed the awards program.

National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H.

In Land Judging, FFA competition, the North Miami, Ind., chapter won in the team category. In the first place individual category there was a tie with two perfect scores and both Jacob Nall, Roland, Okla., FFA and John Schultz, Hitchcock Tulare FFA, S.D., receiving first place trophies. In the 4-H competition the Benton, Ind., chapter was the winning team and Chelsea Stemler, Barbour County, W.Va., was the 4-H individual winner.

In the Range Judging Contest, the Jacksboro, Texas, chapter won the FFA team competition, and Braydan Besselaar of that team won the FFA individual award. The Butte County, S.D., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Jacob Renfro, Young County, Texas, placed first in the 4-H individual category.

In Homesite Evaluation, the Hot Springs, N.M., chapter won the FFA team competition. In the Homesite Evaluation individual category was another tie with both Michelle Shivers of Hot Springs FFA, N.M, and Kasey Strube, Jackson Heights FFA, Kan., receiving first place awards. The Barbour County, W.Va., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Chris Davis, Scott County, Kan., placed first in the 4-H individual category.

Contest cochairman Trey Lam, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, presented the 2010 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award to Kevin Hackett. Hackett is Northwest District program specialist for the Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service. He was honored for helping with the contest for more than 20 years in a variety of roles. Following the presentation of the honoree award, contest cochairman and co-emcee Russell Pierson, age 98, was recognized with a standing ovation for participating in 58 of the 59 years of the contest.

"I would like to thank all the conservation districts, businesses and associations who sponsored this educational contest," Lam said. "It takes a tremendous amount of time, effort and money to put on an annual event like this."

"Special thanks go to the El Reno Federal Corrections Institution and Redlands Community College for hosting the contest," Lam said, "Thanks also to the Noble Foundation for sponsoring the printed program and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for hosting the awards banquet, along with many other sponsors."

Lam said the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Auxiliary sponsored and hosted the Social Hour and Dance. Members of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Employees assist with the very vital contest tabulating, which takes place in the few hours between the end of the contest and the beginning of the awards banquet.

In addition to OACD, contest cosponsors also include Oklahoma Farm Credit, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Sirloin Club of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, American Farmers & Ranchers, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, National Conservation Foundation, Biltmore Hotel Oklahoma and numerous other businesses and organizations.

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