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*- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management*  
**2023 National Range Judging Contest by Sandy Smart**

## **2023 National Range Judging Contest**

The National Range Judging Contest was held in El Reno, Oklahoma on May 4. One 4-H and 3 FFA teams from South Dakota participated in the competition. Dave Ollila (SD Soil Health Coalition), Tyler Swan (NRCS), and Sandy Smart (SDSU Extension) assisted in helping the high school ag teachers and their students practice for the contest. South Dakota students are at a distinct disadvantage as the contest is held around the Oklahoma City area each year. The students need to be able to identify 130 plants (39 grasses, 19 legumes, 41 forbs, and 31 trees/woodies) of which the vast majority are not found in South Dakota. For example, there are 6 bluestems to identify (big bluestem, broomsedge bluestem, old world bluestem, little bluestem, silver bluestem, and splitbeard bluestem) of which we have only 2 species in common (big bluestem and little bluestem). They also, need to learn/memorize each plant's characteristic (life history, season of growth, origin, desirability for bobwhite quail food, cover, and cattle food). Let me tell you, it is a lot of work! I have attended the trip the last 5 times and I am finally learning how to tell these plants apart.

The South Dakota teams typically arrive on Saturday and practices Sunday-Wednesday with the contest held on Thursday morning. When not studying the students get to tour some of the interesting sites, museums, and of course a perennial favorite Brahms. If you haven't had Brahms' ice cream you need to make the trip! We typically start at 7 am and arrive back at the hotel by 9 pm each day, so the ice cream is a nice reward for the long days we put in.

The Day County 4-H team included Matt Mork, Brent Snaza, Sage Sippel, and Blaise McGregor and their coach Fred Zenk placed 2nd in the nation out of 6 teams. Matthew Mork placed 3rd out of 24 student competitors. The Webster FFA team included Chris Gaikowski, Bobbie Eide, and Caleb Weyh coached by Fred Zenk placed 14th out of 26 teams.

The Wessington Springs FFA team included Kristi Munsen, Austin Schimke, Blake Larson, and Laden Christensen and their Coach Brady Duxbury placed 7th in the nation out of 26 teams. Team member Kristi Munsen's scored 820 out of 1000 points which earned her 9th out of 98 student competitors.

The Lemmon FFA team included Katelyn Gebhart, Alyssa Dix, Shannon Gebhart, and Samuel Weishaar and was coached by Renae Gebhart placed 12th out of 26 teams.

(pictures on next page)



Day County 4-H and Webster FFA teams. Pictured left to right: Fred Zenk, Sage Sippel, Bobbi Eide, Caleb Weyh, Brent Snaza, Matt Mork, Blaise McGregor, and Chris Gaikowski. (Photo by S. Smart).



Wessington Springs FFA team. Pictured left to right: Brady Duxbury, Landen Christensen, Austin Schimke, Blake Larson, Kirstie Munsen, Ridge Roduner (Photo by Renae Gebhart).



Lemmon FFA team. Pictured left to right: Alyssa Dix, Katelyn Gebhart, Shannon Gebhart, Sam Weishaar, and Blake Drayton (Photo by Renae Gebhart).