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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management  
2024 National Range Judging Contest by Sandy Smart

## 2024 National Range Judging Contest

The National Range Judging Contest was held in El Reno, Oklahoma on May 2. Four 4-H and three FFA teams from South Dakota participated in the competition. 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 characteristics (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 6 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 Braum's. If you haven't had Braum's 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 contest is split into two categories: 4-H and FFA. Teams from each state had to win their respective regions to qualify for the national contest. SD SRM provides partial financial support to FFA teams. Tyler and I had a great time teaching these young folks and interacting with the Ag teachers. We appreciate the support from SD SRM and SDSU Extension.

### 4-H Range



**Haakon-Bennett County 4-H Range team** placed 1st out of 12 teams. From left to right team members included Emily Zickrick, Colden Kramer, Ashley Schriever, and Tara Schofield. Tyler Swan (NRCS) supported Reed Johnson (coach). Emily Zickrick placed 1st, Colden Kramer placed 5th and Ashley Schriever placed 10th out of 43 national competitors.



**Day County 4-H Range team** placed 3rd out of 12 teams. From left to right team members included Caleb Gaikowski, Bobbi Eidie, Tigh Gaikowski, Caleb Weyh, and Fred Zenk (coach). Bobbi Eide placed 4th and Caleb Gaikowski placed 7th out of 43 national competitors.



**Lemmon County 4-H Range** team placed 5th out of 12 teams. From left to right team members included Shannon Gebhart, Katelyn Gebhart, Blake Drayton and Sam Weishaar. They were coached by Renae Gebhart. Katelyn Gebhart placed 11th and Shannon Gebhart placed 17th out of 43 national competitors.



**West Central Ag 4-H Range** team placed 8th out of 12 teams. From left to right team members included Linda Petersen (coach), Sam Handberg, Alex Siemonsma, Stella Siemonsma, and Kenasyn Johnson. Alex Siemonsma placed 15th out of 43 national competitors.

### FFA Range



**Webster FFA Range** team placed 13th out of 24 teams. From left to right team members included Fred Zenk (coach), Tevin Howder, Dylan Carlson, and Brayden Aadland.

**Wolsey-Wessington FFA Range** team placed 17th out of 24 teams. From left to right team members included Harley Roberts, Kate Hamilton, Jett Kleinsasser, and Ethan Rearick. They were coached by Andrew Boersma.



**Kadoka FFA Range** team placed 15th out of 24 teams. From left to right team members included Kole Hermann, Tance VanderMay, Ayden Amiotte, and Shaylee Porch. They were coached by Kade Bonenberger.

