



SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

Northwest Soil Survey Region

Fort Collins MLRA Soil Survey Office

Colorado Future Farmers of America Land Judging Career Development Event

Purpose

The purpose of the Colorado Future Farmers of America (FFA) Land Judging Career Development Event (CDE) is to provide high school students with practical experience in evaluating soil properties and land characteristics for agricultural and residential use. This event aims to enhance students' understanding of soil science, land use decision-making, and natural resource management. By participating in classroom-based and field-based exercises, students develop critical skills in soil characterization, agricultural interpretation, and homesite evaluation. The contest serves to prepare future agricultural professionals and land managers, fostering an appreciation for sustainable land use practices and conservation efforts in Colorado's diverse landscapes.

Background

The Colorado State FFA Land Judging CDE took place on April 29, 2024. Colorado State University (CSU) and the Sauer Dryland Farm hosted the contest. The farm is about three miles southwest of Fort Collins near Coyote Ridge Natural Area in Loveland, Colorado. The farm produces dryland winter wheat in a no-till wheat-fallow crop rotation. Employees from multiple Colorado NRCS offices and the College of Agricultural Sciences at Colorado State University organized and ran the CDE.

Key Outcomes

CSU hosted the classroom-based Web Soil Survey evaluation portion of the Land Judging CDE on campus at the Morgan Library. The Sauer Dryland Farm hosted the field portion of the event, which included two soil characterization sites for the agricultural interpretation and homesite



evaluation. These evaluations promote understanding of soil properties, interpreting soils and landscapes for specific land uses, and describing soils to make better land use decisions.

In total, 57 students from 17 Colorado school districts participated in the Land Judging CDE. Individuals and district teams received contest result rankings for the combined three exercises.

The hosts left the pits open following the contest for an additional educational opportunity. They invited NRCS staff from local conservation and field offices to provide a demonstrational hands-on learning experience in the open pits. Topics discussed included soil texture, depth to water table, how to determine soil depth, and the difference between lithic and paralithic restrictions.



Figure 1. Contestants from around the State of Colorado participating in a Web Soil Survey evaluation as part of the 2024 Colorado State FFA Land Judging CDE.



Figure 2. Soil enthusiasts assisting with soil pit characterization. Eager to get their hands dirty, many came to assist, including NRCS soil scientists from Fort Morgan, Greeley, Denver, and Fort Collins, students from CSU's Collegiate Soil Judging Team, and the Forest and Range Soils class.



Figure 3. Contestants filling out the score card for the homesite evaluation and agricultural interpretations portions of the 2024 Colorado State FFA Land Judging CDE.