

Kansas State 4-H Meat Judging All-Star Team Proposal

The method to select the 4-H team to represent various states for the National Meat Judging Contest, hosted annually in conjunction with the American Royal at Kansas State University each year in October, varies from state to state. Some states utilize the county/extension unit winning team from the state contest as the representative team. While other states utilize an “All-Star” team format comprised of students from various counties/extension units throughout the state. There is no set required format from National 4-H and is up to the discretion of the states for determination of how they select their representative teams.

Currently, Kansas utilizes the model in which the county/extension district winning team has the ability to choose to either a) compete at the National Contest or b) compete at the National Western in Denver (hosted by Colorado State) in January. Classically, the National Western contest is treated as a consolation contest for teams from the various states, with commonly the 2nd place team in each state competing at the National Western and the state winning teams competing in the American Royal at the National Contest.

However, recently, this has not been the case in Kansas. *Kansas has not had a team represent the state in the National 4-H Meat Judging Contest for the past two years.* This is because the winning team has deferred and instead selected to compete in the National Western as opposed to the National Contest. The teams that finished 2nd and 3rd also deferred and chose not to compete in the National Contest. This has happened several times in the past as well, with Kansas not represented in the National Contest several times over the past decade. There are several reasons teams have chosen to defer including:

- Once team members compete in the National Contest, they lose eligibility for the state contest
- Teams comprised of various ages of students do not want to “burn” the eligibility of younger team members and have them lose the opportunity to compete in the state contest in subsequent years
- Teams that are younger and have not competed enough to have sufficient experience to compete at the National Contest
- Attending a contest in Denver is a more attractive “reward” for students for winning the state contest as opposed to competing in another contest hosted at Kansas State

The meat judging contest in Kansas has shown significant growth over the past several years and will likely continue to grow in the future. This is due to several reasons including a) allowing students to compete at a younger age in the Intermediate division, thus exposing students to meat judging earlier in their judging careers and b) the inclusion and importance of the meat judging contest in the Sweepstakes competition.

Despite this growth, it is not anticipated that the observed trend in teams deferring their ability to attend the National Contest will change. This creates several challenges for the youth competing in the state including:

- Kansas has no representation at the National Contest (hosted at Kansas State, nonetheless)
- Students in the state who are on state winning teams never have the ability to compete at the National Contest and represent the state in this prestigious competition

As a result, it is proposed that Kansas move to an “All-Star” team model for selection of students for the state team to compete at the National Contest. This would not be the first such model in Kansas, as the Livestock Judging competition moved to a similar model several years ago. The reaction to the Livestock “All-Star” team has been overwhelmingly positive, as it has provided many benefits to the youth whom compete in the competition.

The following outlines the proposal for the creation of a similar meat judging “All-Star” team for the state. Additionally, the creation of such a team would still allow the state winning county/extension district team to compete at the National Western, thus preserving their ability to compete at a national competition as a team.

Outline for Proposed Kansas 4-H Meat Judging “All-Star” Team

- The State Meat Judging Contest held at the 4-H Sweepstakes will serve as the qualifying contest
- Top 8 individuals who are eligible to compete in the National Contest will be given the opportunity to compete for the “All-Star” team
- Participation in 2-3 weekend workout sessions at Kansas State will be required to be selected as a team member
- Total points from combined state contest and practice sessions will be used to determine the representatives selected for the “All-Star” team participation at the National Contest held in conjunction with the American Royal and hosted at Kansas State in October
- Kansas State will provide coaching through current and former meat judging team members and graduate students
- Chaperons will be recruited as needed to meet 4-H risk management requirements before travel
- The county/extension district winning team will be provided the opportunity to compete at the National Western in January
- “All-Star” team members will complete their 4-H meat judging eligibility following their competition at the National Contest in October

Positive Benefits to the Creation of a 4-H Meat Judging “All-Star” Team

- Re-energized enthusiasm for Meat Judging through educational opportunities. Currently, only full teams have the ability to earn eligibility to compete at national competitions. Single competitors presently from counties/extension districts are unable to continue the learning opportunities without team members.
- Allows for students who excel individually to be recognized and have the ability to compete nationally without the requirement of local team success
- Does not force teams to make the decision of whether or not to “burn” younger student’s eligibility in order for older students to compete at the National Contest
- Allows for greater learning opportunities for younger students with the ability to continue to maintain eligibility while teammates are allowed to compete at the National Competition
- Will increase long-term participation in the meat judging competition and allow for students to have greater exposure to the meat industry
- Chance for intense meat judging training from K-State Animal Science graduate student for furthering skills and mastery in animal sciences
- Introduction and exposure to Kansas State University and the College of Agriculture’s Animal Science department for recruitment
- Opportunity for more diverse young people to represent Kansas at a National Contest
- Focus on older, mature youth for a step-by-step growth progression; ability to retain older 4-H members enrolled
- Teens train, mentor and encourage younger 4-H members by sharing skills learned through participation on “All-Star” team
- Increased sharing of meat judging knowledge throughout state
- Increased knowledge and maturity improves readiness for National 4-H Contest