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# Grassroots

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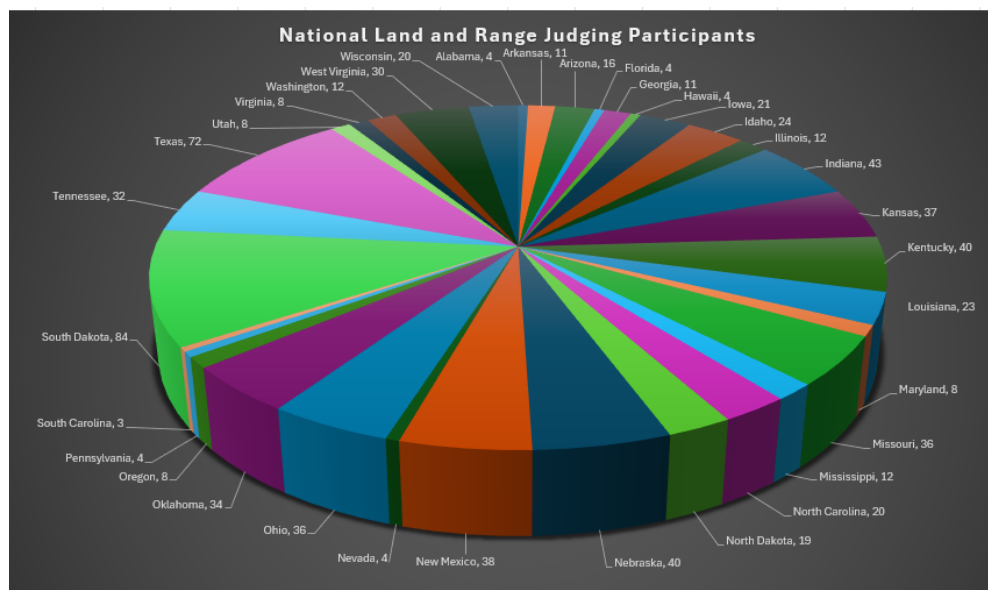
MAY 2025

## South Dakota Commitment to Youth Agriculture Training

by Sandy Smart

The National 4-H and FFA Land and Range Judging Contest was held in El Reno, Oklahoma on May 1, 2025. A total of 778 high school students from across the nation participated in the three contests. The Land Judging contest had 439 contestants, Homesite Judging contest had 313 contestants, and the Range Judging contest had 129 contestants. Some students judged both the Land and Homesite contests, so that is why the total number of individual judging participants (n=778) is less than the number of contestants (n=881).

What is particularly noteworthy is the number of students attending the national contest from each state. There were 34 states involved of which South Dakota had 10.8% of the total (84 out of 778). The next highest was Texas with 9.3%. What is amazing is that Texas has 34 times the population of South Dakota. This demonstrates the huge commitment of our South Dakota's high school agricultural programs. There were 14 Ag teachers/FFA Advisors, 4 mentors from Extension and NRCS, and several parent chaperones that served the South Dakota students. Our hotel had 62 rooms blocked off. The trip takes a week of everyone's time and is expensive. The students work really hard and the trip is a good learning experience of which great memories and friendships are made. Thank you to all who help make this tradition possible, both those who volunteer and those who give financially. You should be very proud of South Dakota agriculture youth training.



Data used in generating this figure was from Judging Card (<https://www.judgingcard.com/>).

## Regenerative Grazing Planning by Dan Rasmussen

As a range consultant with the Grazing School Follow-up Program, many of the ranches I have had the pleasure of working with face similar basic obstacles. With a little help these obstacles often turn into opportunities.

Here is a list of some of the common obstacles people face:

- Moving from season-long grazing to a pasture rotation.
- Water in the right place in the right quantity.
- New fences in the right places.
- Mindset - Changing your paradigm.
- Drought - A grazing plan helps offset the effects of low rainfall.
- Financial demands.

**Moving from season-long grazing to a pasture rotation** is a common obstacle on this list. Season-long grazing has detrimental effects on plant diversity and soil health. These pastures are slow to recover after a drought and produce less forage than pastures in a rotation. Once the decision has been made to start subdividing pastures and/or combining herds, then grazing planning is key to regenerative management.

**Water.** Each paddock needs to be adequately watered. If the water source does not supply enough for the herd size, then adding water storage often solves this problem. The cost of supplying water can often be lowered by using above ground pipe in the summer.

**Fencing.** A cost effective interior fence is one strand high tensile wire with fiberglass posts. These are permanent, resistant to snow loads, and 1/5th the initial cost of barbed wire fences.

**Mindset.** It is natural for people to be reluctant to change management practices, since at one time they felt good about the management they were doing. Change can be difficult. Effective management often involves making a small change and then observing the results. Correct the mistakes and replan. Always asking the question, “what does nature want me to do?”.

**Drought.** If the soil in your season-long grazed pastures resembles a brick rather than a sponge, your “effective rainfall” will be a fraction of the water actually hitting the ground. Healthy soil, healthy plants and roots create what nature intended - a soil that resembles a sponge. Healthy soil quickly absorbs the raindrops, holding the water. Water running off your pastures and leaving your ranch is a financial loss. If out of a 2” rain 1 ½” runs off your pasture the effective rainfall is ½”. After the drought ends, healthy plants growing in healthy soil recover much faster than unhealthy plants in poor soil.

**Financial concerns.** Cost share for fencing, water development and grass seedings is available from both government and non-government sources.

Regenerative Grazing Planning Continued Page 3

## Regenerative Grazing Planning Continued by Dan Rasmussen



Yearling steers ready to move to the next pasture on daily moves.

Nature is the ultimate low cost ranch manager. Managers can learn how to expand opportunities to lower costs, reduce the impact of drought, increase overall grass production, provide habitat for wildlife, maintain a pleasant working environment and make a profit.

The Grassland Coalition Grazing Schools offer an in-depth study of how to improve the plant and soil health of your pastures. There are three grazing schools offered each summer across the state. To sign up to attend one of these schools, go to [www.sdgrass.org](http://www.sdgrass.org).

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Dan is a third-generation cattle rancher living on his family ranch in south central South Dakota. Dan served as a past board member of the Grassland Coalition and is currently the Grazing School Follow-up Ranch Consulting coordinator for the Coalition.

## 100 'Our Amazing Grassland' Videos by Sandy Smart

Our Amazing Grassland video series started a new project by addressing topical issues rather than showcasing individual grassland operations. To date there have been 100 videos produced and you can view them on YouTube at <https://youtube.com/>. Over 90 of them feature producers. In April 2024, the team started to mix in topics like prescribed burning, grassland birds, beaver, wildlife, history of grasslands, grassland loss, and young and upcoming generations. The latest release is about the Central Grassland Roadmap and the South Dakota Grassland Initiative.



The Central Grassland Roadmap video features SDSU President Dr. Barry Dunn explaining the history of the Great Plains grasslands. Hear from ranchers, conservationists, academics, and others discuss the South Dakota Grassland Initiative and the hope we have in working together to protect and restore grasslands in South Dakota and beyond.

Another one of my favorite videos is the January 2025 video "History of the Grasslands, Brookings County". Again this video features SDSU President Dr. Barry Dunn. He explains his heritage where he grew up on the prairies of western South Dakota to eventually moving to his wife's homestead in Brookings County near the Big Sioux River. Barry covers the devastation of the "Dirty 30s" as a result of plowing up the grasslands. He leaves you with the hope of people working to protect our remaining grasslands and restoring cropland back to grass.



The February 2025 video "Grassland Loss" features board member and former NRCS State Conservationist, Jeff Zimprich, explaining the drivers of grassland loss. Hear from State Representative Liz Larson talk about a joint resolution on the value of grasslands. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, Shane Reis, and rancher Sara Grim talk about the woody encroachment issue causing resource losses for livestock grazers.

Finally, the March 2025 video "Young and Upcoming Generations" opens with SDSU President Dr. Barry Dunn and a host of young people describing their connection to ranching as they enter into production agriculture. The video also features the late NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, Mitch Faulkner, and how he spent time working with youth in his area. This is a very touching video, especially for those who knew Mitch.





# ANR Connections: An SDSU Extension Workforce Development Program for Natural Resource Professionals by Sandy Smart



Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Connections is led by South Dakota State University Extension with participation by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, and the South Dakota Grassland Coalition.

**Our vision** is to provide natural resource professionals with a sense of belonging, and the skills to build a satisfying career in South Dakota.

**Our mission** is to build career confident professionals through diverse curriculum and experiences.

## Needs statement

South Dakota State University Extension in collaboration with state, federal, and non-governmental organizations recognized the need for additional workforce development for newer (< 5 years work experience) natural resource professionals working in South Dakota. In South Dakota, 85% of the natural resources (wildlife, water, soils, vegetation, etc.) are managed by private landowners on working lands for growing crops, providing pasture for grazing animals, and feeding livestock in confinement. Recent graduates in natural resources have increasingly less practical experience and personal knowledge of basic agricultural practices, agricultural business structure, and interpersonal skills to confidently interact with agricultural producers.

## Curriculum overview

ANR Connections will provide newer natural resource professionals with a broad overview of the main agricultural production systems in South Dakota, learn from seasoned-career professionals, meet innovative conservation-minded producers, network with growers and conservation professionals, learn how to connect with people in local communities, and participate in hands-on agricultural activities.

The timeline of this curriculum follows the growing season of major crops and livestock grown in South Dakota from planting and birth to harvesting. Students will learn weekly from Extension professionals, producers, and seasoned-career NRM professionals, and participate in in-person field trips of field crop farms, beef cow-calf and feedlot operations, dairy farms, and swine farms. Finally, students will get real-world experiences such as riding in a combine, artificially inseminating a cow, visiting a sale barn, participate in a branding, scouting for field crop pests, and fixing fence on a ranch. For more information visit our webpage at: <https://extension.sdstate.edu/anr-connections>.



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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management by Sandy Smart

## 2025 National Range Judging Results

The National Range Judging Contest was held in El Reno, Oklahoma on May 1. Two 4-H and five FFA teams from South Dakota participated in the competition. Tyler Swan (NRCS), Sandy Smart (SDSU Extension), and Kaylee Wheeler (SDSU Extension) assisted in helping the high school Ag Teachers/FFA Advisors and their students practice for the contest.

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!

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.

## 4-H Range Judging



Wessington Springs School 4-H Range Judging team placed 2<sup>nd</sup> out of 7 teams. From left to right team members included Brady Duxbury (coach), Landen Christensen, Hayes Christensen, Ridge Roduner, Robert Hine, and Tyler Swan (mentor). Hayes Christensen placed 5<sup>th</sup>, Landen Christensen placed 6<sup>th</sup>, Robert Hine placed 9<sup>th</sup>, and Ridge Roduner placed 10<sup>th</sup> out of 25 national competitors.

West Central Ag 4-H Range Judging team placed 6<sup>th</sup> out of 7 teams. From left to right team members included Linda Petersen (coach), Nate Struck, Noah Ericson, Hailey Goebel, and Grace Rick.







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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management  
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## FFA Range Judging



Webster FFA Range Judging team placed 12<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams. From left to right team members included Caleb Gaikowski, Lola Wells, Mackenzie Atherton, Bryn Sippel, and Fred Zenk (coach).

Wessington Springs FFA Range Judging team placed 13<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams. From left to right team members included Bailey Yost, Holden Jackson, Peyton Walz, and Mercedes Jones. They were coached by Brady Duxbury.



Sunshine Bible Academy FFA Range Judging team placed 14<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams. From left to right team members included Tanner Fox, Daraby Boersma, Dakota Boersma, Jimmy Burma, and Jason Burma (coach).

West Central FFA Range Judging team placed 16<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams. From left to right team members included Linda Petersen (coach), Blake Tuschen, Sam Handberg, Stella Siemonsma, and Kenasyn Johnson.



Kadoka FFA Range Judging team placed 17<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams. From left to right team members included Dalton Grimes, Zachary Varner, Makaylan Bonenberger, and Isabella Williams. They were coached by Kaycee Jones.



Sandy Smart  
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## Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone/email/website
Prescribed Fire Class & Live Training	May 20	SDSU Oak Lake Field Station	Pete Bauman	Peter.bauman@sdstate.edu
Bird Tour	May 30-31	Chamberlain	Judge Jessop	jljessop@kennebectelephone.com
Young Adult Ranching For Profit Workshop	June 2-5	Faith	Judge Jessop	jljessop@kennebectelephone.com
Rangeland and Soil Days	June 10-11	Belle Fourche	Kaylee Wheeler	Kaylee.wheeler@sdstate.edu
Wall Grazing School	June 16-18	Wall	Judge Jessop	jljessop@kennebectelephone.com

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2207D, 114 Berg Hall, Brookings, SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-4940



