



2026

Dairy Cattle Evaluation and Management

2026 Updates

Below is a summary of updates to the Dairy Cattle Evaluation Management CDE Handbook for the 2026 convention cycle. We plan to release handbook changes that may impact instruction in June of the year prior, but may finalize smaller updates through February of the competition year. All updates and changes aim to provide a positive, relevant experience for all competitors.

- **HANDBOOK UPDATE:**

JULY 2025

- Team Activity — Added the focus: Genetics/Reproduction — 2026

JANUARY 2026

Policies and Guidelines

I. Eligibility of Students

- Added — Eligibility is based on the **National FFA membership year (August 1–July 31)**— not a school's academic calendar or "rising grade" designation.

Rationale: Clarifying that a student must be a 7th-grade member on the date of the qualifying event to compete or qualify at a state qualifying event. A student who is still a 6th-grade member on that date is not eligible to qualify and may compete for 7th-grade consideration only in qualifying events held on or after August 1.

- Added the following to the rules regarding FFA Official Dress for the event: "Appropriate dress for the evaluation classes may be adjusted to black slacks and comfortable, closed-toe shoes due to the outdoor surfaces.

Rationale: We want the students to become accustomed to presenting themselves in appropriate professional attire. It conveys confidence and shows respect for their task/role.

Refer to the National FFA Career and Leadership Events webpage on [FFA.org](https://ffa.org) for the most up-to-date career and leadership development handbook edition.

CONTACT

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FFA VISION

Growing the next generation of leaders who will change the world.

FFA MISSION

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

FFA CODE OF CONDUCT

FFA members participating in National FFA programs understand and agree to abide by the National FFA Code of Conduct at:
<https://ffa.app.box.com/s/x6l2lkovv4x9tgiegy73mei30zvlip5i>

Guiding Principles

National awards and competitive events should:

1. Inspire members to explore, learn, and be prepared for future careers related to the AFNR career pathways and FFA AFNR Value Chain.
2. Recognize achievements in skill development and knowledge, including:
 - a. leveraging relevant technologies
 - b. utilizing creative problem-solving
 - c. meeting developmentally appropriate learning objectives (Bloom's Taxonomy)
 - d. utilizing employability skills (teamwork, communication, collaboration)
3. Be accessible and engaging for all students and FFA members.
4. Provide awards and recognition opportunities for students at all levels.
5. Work with other groups to utilize or partner with existing experiences.
6. Provide feedback that promotes personal and professional growth.

Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR)

Career Cluster Content Standards

The National Council for Agricultural Education has provided permission to the National FFA Organization to use the National AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards in the development of their educational resource materials. The National Council for Agricultural Education is the owner and developer of the National AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards © 2016 and reserves all rights to the original material used here with permission. In addition, the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education/National Career Technical Education Foundation (NASDCTE/NCTEF) has provided permission to use the Common Career and Technical Core (CCTC) Standards in support of this project. NASDCTE/NCTEF are the owners and developers of the Common Career and Technical Core (CCTC) Standards © 2012 and reserve all rights to the original material used here with permission.

The National FFA Organization has adopted the AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards and integrated them into the national award and recognition programs for the benefit of members, school administration, and agriculture as a whole. For a complete set of the standards, please visit the [2016 AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards](https://ffa.app.box.com/s/hrxlqvw7g6zo54xfi5x5kytlyusqjhy0). You may access the standards alignments for this event at <https://ffa.app.box.com/s/hrxlqvw7g6zo54xfi5x5kytlyusqjhy0>.

Professional Integrity

FFA members participating in national FFA programs and events understand and agree that all work must result from their own effort and ability, created, and completed alone (except for partner or chapter applications). When outside sources (direct quotes or phrases, specific dates, figures, or other materials) are used for a project, document, or application, the required reference citation must be completed according to the rules specified by the applicable handbook.

While participating in National FFA programs, FFA members are prohibited from:

- Plagiarizing
- Violating copyright
- Cheating
- Falsifying information
- Using another person's results or thoughts as their own, even with this person's permission. This includes work done by a family member or a mentor.
- Using information or data obtained from the internet without proper citation.

Any attempt to gain an unfair advantage will not be tolerated. Non-compliance represents plagiarism and will automatically disqualify a member.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for National Programs and Events

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems capable of performing complex tasks that historically only a human could do, such as reasoning, making decisions, or solving problems. As AI continues to evolve, it can be a tremendous tool to help companies, organizations and individuals enhance their productivity and work. Therefore, the National FFA Organization allows the use of AI tools. FFA members may use AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and CoPilot, to assist them in their learning.

Appropriate uses of AI may include:

- generating ideas for any FFA-related assignments, projects, contests and award applications
- checking facts of a phenomenon
- checking for and correcting grammatical errors in a paper written by a member

For more information, please see the [Standard Operating Procedures on the Use of Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) for National Programs and Events document](#).

Member Safety

At National FFA, we're committed to creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all members— students, educators, and families alike. We believe in fostering premier leadership, personal growth, and career success, and that starts with a community built on respect and professionalism. These guidelines outline the expectations for behavior and conduct across all FFA activities and spaces. By upholding these principles, members help ensure FFA remains a place where everyone can thrive.

Please take a moment to review these policies, [here](#) (Member Safety at FFA.org), which includes an agreement to abide by the [National FFA Code of Conduct](#). Adherence is essential—violations may result in disciplinary action, including restricted access to events.

2026 CAREER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EVENTS GUIDELINES

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

I. Eligibility of Students

- a. Eligibility is based on the National FFA membership year (August 1–July 31)—not a school's academic calendar or "rising grade" designation.
- b. Each student must be a student FFA member on the current roster in good standing with the local chapter, state FFA association, and the National FFA Organization during the school year in which the student qualified to participate at the national level.
- c. If a student's name is not on the chapter's official roster, please work with the National FFA membership team to update the membership before the national event.
- d. The student, at the national event, must be:
 - i. A secondary education (grades 7–12) FFA member during the school year in which the participant qualified to participate at the national level as determined by the roster at the time of qualifying.
 - ii. A graduating senior is eligible to compete in state and national career and leadership development events up to and including their first national convention following graduation.)
 - iii. Participants in the Creed Speaking and Conduct of Chapter Meetings LDEs must qualify as a 7th, 8th, or 9th grade member.
- e. If a student moves to a different chapter or a different state once the student has qualified as a state representative in an event, that student may be allowed to compete in the national event with the school they qualified with during the qualifying year.
- f. A student may only participate in the same official CDE/LDE once. No student may participate in more than one National FFA event each year.
- g. Each student participating in a national event must complete an online Waiver and

release of Liability through the convention registration system.

II. Selection/Certification of State Teams

- a. Each state will submit a team declaration form by July 1, before the national FFA convention. Participation in each declared event will incur an entry processing fee. [State Staff Declaration Instructions](#).
- b. Each team will be composed of the number of members determined by the specific event rules and formats. The members of a state team must be from the same chapter.
- c. All students must be certified online by the designated deadline of Sept. 1 or within 10 days of the qualifying date if after the deadline. Advisors or state staff must certify members in each event by the certification deadline [How to certify a team or member Instructions](#).
- d. Once the original certification has been completed, no member may be added without first deleting a member. (See III. Drop/Add Process).
- e. State staff shall approve students are eligible (See I. Eligibility of Students). State [Staff Certification Approval Instructions](#) If an ineligible student participates in any career or leadership development event, the member will be disqualified, which may also impact the team's ranking.
- f. States may approve teams comprised of fewer members than the required members.
- g. Substitutions of any student or team are subject to the determination and approval of the state association.
- h. If reputable international competitions invite teams to competition the national organization will certify National FFA Career and Leadership Development Event winners for international competition when states request. This is with the understanding that the state team will provide their travel expenses.

III. Drop/Add Process

- a. If a student needs to be substituted or dropped, the online drop/add process must be used to substitute or drop the team member. A team member must be dropped before another team member may be substituted. [How to Drop/Add a team member Instructions](#)
- b. The Drop/Add must be submitted one hour before the first event component or official activity of an event as listed in the schedule of events. Changes will not be permitted after this time.
- c. Members added to any team must meet all the eligibility and membership requirements described in this Guide's other sections.
- d. Substitutions may be allowed after the online document submission date (See individual Event Handbooks for details).
- e. Event superintendents may stop any student if they deem their manner hazardous to themselves or others. Such action may result in a zero or lower score for that student for that section of the career or leadership development event.
- f. Students who start an event and do not complete it without notifying event officials at the time of departure may be disqualified. This can affect the overall team rank and position; in some events, it could also disqualify the entire team.
- g. Students will not be allowed to utilize personal electronic communication devices other than those approved by the event officials during the entire event. Students who access personal electronic communication devices without prior approval from the event officials may be disqualified from the national event.

IV. Disqualification

- a. FFA members participating in national FFA programs and events understand and agree that all work must result from their effort and ability, created and completed alone (except for partner or chapter applications). Details about Professional Integrity, the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for National Programs and Events, and the National FFA Code of Conduct are included in event handbooks.
- b. Any verbal or non-verbal communication between students during an event that is not part of the event will be sufficient cause to eliminate the team member involved from the career development event.
- c. Teams or students arriving after the career development event has begun may be disqualified or penalized. This includes a zero or lower score for that team or student for the missed section of the career or leadership development event.
- d. Any assistance given to a student from any source other than the career development event officials or assistants will be sufficient to disqualify that student from the career and leadership development event.
- h. Any CDE/LDE student, team, advisor, or coach who is proven to have gained access to event materials intended for or utilized by the event committee during the competition will be disqualified from the national event.

Purpose

The National FFA Dairy Cattle Evaluation and Management Career Development Event aims to provide a competitive event for agricultural education students that emphasizes skills in dairy cattle management and evaluation.

Objectives

- To provide practical experience to students in agricultural education interested in dairy cattle to help prepare them for industry positions or to manage a modern dairy herd.
- To develop students' observation, analysis, communication, and team collaboration skills.
- To provide experience evaluating dairy cattle type, production records and herd management.
- To encourage agriculture instructors to seek assistance from various resources in the dairy industry. (Examples: dairy breed associations, artificial breeding organizations, state extension dairy specialists, herd improvement associations, dairy equipment manufacturers, local dairy farmers and breeders, etc.)

Event Rules

Review the Career and Leadership Development Event Policy and Guidelines for information on eligibility, selection, certification, team member changes, disqualification and more.

[General Information for National Competition](#) can provide general guidance on preparing for national competition.

Each team will be comprised of four members.

- All four participant scores will determine the total team score.
- It is highly recommended that participants wear FFA Official Dress for this event. Appropriate dress for the evaluation classes may be adjusted to black slacks and comfortable, closed-toe shoes due to the outdoor surfaces.
- Participants will report to the team orientation meeting for instructions at the time and places shown in the current year's team orientation packet.
- The most current and updated information will be used as industry standards change.

Event Format

Each participant must have:

- Two sharpened No. 2 pencils.
- Calculator — Should be battery-operated, non-programmable and non-scientific (basic five functions only). No other calculators are to be used during the event.

- **Electronic Devices:** Each state team or individual may be required to provide a laptop computer or other personal electronic devices for participation in the dairy cattle evaluation event. Minimum specifications will be determined and posted on the event webpage in the team orientation packet prior to the event.

Equipment provided:

- All paper and clipboards will be provided. Participants are not to bring any paper or clipboards.
- The event committee will provide all other necessary materials.

Team Activity *500 points*

Each team will have a dairy farm management scenario to identify problems and determine possible improvements (see references). All necessary information will be provided. The upcoming year's annual topic will be specified in the CDE/LDE Planning Guide posted in January.

Past topics have included the following areas, but the topic area is not limited to this list. Each scenario may include animal welfare, biosecurity, business management, current issues, environmental management and safety concerns related to the topic.

- Housing/Facilities
- Health/Diseases — 2025
- Genetics/Reproduction — 2026
- Young Stock Management
- Feeds/Nutrition

Team Expectations

- Teams should assume the role of a hired consultant advising a producer (judges).
- Teams will be given 40 minutes to prepare their recommendations to be presented to a panel of judges.
- It is not necessary to describe the scenario to the judges since they are the producers.
- Teams will be allowed 10 minutes to present their recommendations, followed by five minutes of clarifying questions from the judges.

Team Practicums *600 points*

In 2025, the General Knowledge exam will be replaced with 3 team practicums. The committee will announce five of the ten practicums listed below for the event in the orientation materials, and teams will be given three of those five to complete at the event.

Herd Record Activity: Herd Record activities will support informed decision-making in dairy herd management. These include the systematic recording and analysis of data related to the health, productivity, and management of the herd, such as identification, health records, production records, breeding records, and growth records.

Data Analysis from Automatic Systems Activity: Data Analysis from Automatic Systems Activities will involve using advanced technologies to monitor and manage various aspects of dairy farming, including behavior and health monitoring, estrous and calving detection, robot herd analysis, calf/heifer data analysis, and feeding activity.

Feed/Nutrition Activity: Feed/Nutrition Activities will be developed to ensure the cattle receive the proper nutrition at the right time, contributing to their overall health and productivity. These activities include a balanced diet, feeding schedule, nutritional monitoring, feed intake management, feed quality control, and feeding a total mixed ration (TMR).

Genomic Data Activity: Genomic Data Activities will utilize data from test results. The results from genomic tests better enable producers to select traits within their herd and make decisions on genetic selection based on the producer's goals. The prioritized traits can include any combination of health, production or type traits. More customized traits such as polled, A2A2, Kappa-Casein and Methane Efficiency results may also be considered. Genomic test results can also assist producers in segmenting their herd to maximize animals with higher genetic merit in the top percentile ranking by using sexed semen or IVF flushing of these animals. Lower percentile ranked animals can have their genetic influence reduced by being bred to beef semen or used as embryo recipients. Lastly, genomic test results allow excess heifers with lower genetic merit in inventory to be culled to reduce heifer-raising costs.

Herd Health Analysis and Practice Activity: Herd Health Analysis and Practice Activities will be designed to ensure dairy cattle's optimal care and well-being and reduce productivity losses caused by disease and management errors in a dairy herd. This may include individual cow health care, analytic and training activities, quality control programs, preventive programs, and record keeping. An example could be creating a customized herd health plan that meets a farm's unique needs.

Keep/Cull Activity: In a Keep/Cull Activity, participants will select the best animals using performance data to justify basic mating programs and/or analyze a breeding management program, pedigree, and sire proof selection.

Economic Evaluation and Decision-Making Activity: Economic Evaluation and Decision-Making Activities are a strategic approach to managing a dairy farm's profitability and sustainability. They include reproductive efficiency and programs, feeds and nutrition, housing, waste management, and tools and software that assist with determining financial decisions.

Milking Equipment and Quality Activity: Milking Equipment and Quality Activities analyze the efficiency and quality of milk production by selecting the appropriate equipment to maintain high hygiene standards. This may include selection and monitoring of milking machines, sanitation supplies, storage and cooling systems, milking parlor design, and California Mastitis Test analysis.

Current Issues Activity: Current Issues Activities address the many challenges impacting dairy cattle's health and productivity. These issues require ongoing attention and innovative solutions to ensure the industry's sustainability and profitability. Potential topics may include climate impact, disease outbreaks, economic challenges, labor issues, consumer trends, animal health, and animal welfare.

Calf and Heifer Management Activity: Calf and Heifer Management Activities focus on young animals' health, nutrition, and development. These activities aim to ensure the successful development of productive replacement animals and contribute to dairy farms' overall efficiency and profitability. Potential topics may include birth and newborn care, feeding and nutrition, growth and development, housing, and disease prevention.

Individual Activities

Evaluation and Selection (300 points)

Placing Classes

- Six classes will be placed on type. Classes will be selected from the recognized breeds of dairy cattle. The class selection committee, however, shall give priority to selecting quality cattle in the breeds available and not to having all breeds represented in the evaluation classes. Classes will consist of heifers, young cows or mature cows.
- Class or classes may contain production/pedigree data as part of the evaluation process.
- Participants will be permitted to view the animals from all angles but will not be permitted to handle them.
- The dairy cattle handlers will wear numbers, which identify the animals.
- Each class is worth 50 points maximum for a correct placing.
- Participants will have 12 minutes to place each class. For classes in which oral reasons will be given, participants will be given 15 minutes. Participants will be provided paper to take notes on each reasons class for preparation.

Oral Reasons (150 points)

- Oral reasons will be required on three classes. These classes will be designated by the event superintendent prior to the actual evaluation of the class. Participants will be provided paper to take notes on each reasons class for preparation.
- Oral reasons will be given in another location immediately following the evaluation classes.
- Participants may not use notes during the delivery of reasons. Points will be deducted for the use of notes.
- Each class is worth 50 points maximum for each set of reasons.
- Participants will have 15 minutes to prepare each set of oral reasons. No more than two minutes may be used to deliver the reasons before the judges.

Scoring

Activity	2025	
	Individual	Team
Team Practicums		600
Team Activity		500
Evaluation - 6 Placing classes	300	1200
Oral reasons	150	600
Total possible points	450	2,900

Tiebreakers

If a tie occurs, the following events will be used to determine award recipients:

Individual

- Oral reasons score.
- Evaluation score.

Team

- Team activity score.
- Total oral reasons score.
- Total team practicum score.
- Total evaluation score.

Awards

Awards will be presented at the awards ceremony to individuals and/or teams based upon their final rankings. Advisors of cash award recipients will receive information about claiming their award following the convention. Guidelines for amounts and recipients of cash awards can be found [here](#).

Specialty Awards

The high-scoring participant in each of the following categories will also receive a certificate recognizing their accomplishment:

- Oral reasons score
- Team dairy management activity
- Placing classes

References

This list of references is not intended to be all-inclusive.

Other sources may be utilized, and teachers are encouraged to make use of the very best instructional materials available. The following list contains references that may prove helpful during event preparation.

- National FFA past CDE materials, FFA.org
- Hoard's Dairyman — Judging contest and materials, youth tests and quiz questions and current industry issues, www.hoards.com
- Cornell University Department of Animal Science Dairy Resources, <https://cals.cornell.edu/nys-https://cals.cornell.edu/nys-4-h-animal-science-programs/state-events/contest-resources/dairy-judging>
- Virginia Dairy Quiz Bowl study materials, <https://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu/youth/quizbowl/youth-quiz-bowl.html>
- CEV Multimedia, Inc., <https://www.icevonline.com/>
- Holstein Foundation Education Workbooks, <http://www.holsteinfoundation.org/education/workbooks.html>
- Holstein Foundation Youth Programs: Dairy Bowl Materials, <http://www.holsteinfoundation.org/youthprograms/dairybowl.html>
- Dairy Herd Improvement, www.drms.org
- Current Dairy Unified Scorecard, <http://www.purebreddairycattle.com/pages/Literature.php>
- Gillispie, James R. Modern Livestock and Poultry Production (most current edition). Albany, N.Y.: Delmar Cengage Learning, Inc. Cengage Publishers, Cengage.com

Team Activity: Content of Presentation Rubric

400 POINTS

Chapter		State		Team Number		
Indicator	Very strong evidence of skill 5–4 points	Moderate evidence of skill 3–2 points	Weak evidence of skill 1–0 points	Points Earned	Weight	Total Points
Opening statement	Begins with an impact statement or question that articulates the focus of the topic area	Begins with an impact statement or question that is vague concerning the topic area	Begins with a statement or question that is completely irrelevant to the topic area		X 4	
Identification of problem areas	Four or more problems from the scenario are accurately identified and discussed	Two to three problems from the scenario are accurately identified and discussed	One or no problems from the scenario are accurately identified and discussed		X 8	
Supporting information	Does an outstanding job discussing industry trends using related statistics	Does an adequate job discussing industry trends using related statistics	Vaguely discusses industry trends using related statistics		X 12	
Factors of impact	All factors that are impacted by problems listed in the scenario are addressed (i.e., economic impact, production factors, etc.)	Some factors that are impacted by problems listed in the scenario are addressed (i.e., economic impact, production factors, etc.)	Little or no factors that are impacted by problems listed in the scenario are addressed (i.e. economic impact, production factors, etc.)		X 20	
Identifying solutions	All solutions connect with and support industry best practices	Some solutions connect with and support industry best practices	Solutions do not connect with and do not support industry best practices		X 20	
Implementation of solutions	All solutions are correctly prioritized for implementation; provides complete justification for the implementation process	Few solutions are correctly prioritized for implementation; provides little justification for the implementation process	Solutions are incorrectly prioritized for implementation; provides no justification for the implementation process		X 12	
Conclusion	Provides a summary statement that provides a clear and concise overview of the topic area	Provides a summary statement that provides a vague overview of the topic area	Provides a summary statement that has little relevance to the topic area		X 4	
Total Points						

Team Activity: Communications of Outcomes Rubric

100 points

Chapter	State			Team Number		
Indicator	Very strong evidence of skill 5–4 points	Moderate evidence of skill 3–2 points	Weak evidence of skill 1–0 points	Points Earned	Weight Total	Total Points
Speaking without hesitation	Speaks very articulately without hesitation Never has the need for unnecessary pauses or hesitation when speaking	Speaks articulately but sometimes hesitates Occasionally has the need for a long pause or moderate hesitation when speaking	Speaks articulately but frequently hesitates Frequently hesitates or has long, awkward pauses while speaking		X 4	
Tone	Appropriate tone is consistent Speaks at the right pace to be clear Pronunciation of words is very clear and intent is apparent	Appropriate tone is usually consistent Speaks at the right pace most of the time but shows some nervousness Pronunciation of words is usually clear, sometimes vague	Has difficulty using an appropriate tone Pace is too fast; nervous Pronunciation of words is difficult to understand; unclear		X 4	
Being detail-oriented	Stay fully focused and detail-oriented. Always provides details that support the issue; is well organized	Stays mostly focused and detail-oriented. Usually provides details that are supportive of the issue; displays good organizational skills	Has difficulty being detail-oriented Sometimes overlooks details that could be very beneficial to the issue; lacks organization		X 4	
Speaking unrehearsed	Speaks unrehearsed with comfort and ease Speaks quickly with organized thoughts and concise answers	Speaks unrehearsed with comfort and ease most of the time but sometimes seems nervous or unsure Speaks effectively, has to stop and think and sometimes gets off focus	Shows nervousness or seems unprepared when speaking unrehearsed Seems to ramble or speaks before thinking		X 4	
Connecting and articulating facts and issues	Exemplary in connecting facts and issues and articulating how they impact the issue locally and globally Possesses a strong knowledge base and effectively articulates information regarding related facts and current issues	Sufficient in connecting facts and issues and articulating how they impact the issue locally and globally Possesses a good knowledge base and, for the most part, articulates information regarding related facts and current issues	Has difficulty with connecting facts and issues and articulating how they impact the issue locally and globally Possesses some knowledge base but is unable to articulate information regarding related facts and current issues		X 3	
All team members participated	All team members took an active role in the presentation.	Three team members took an active role in the presentation.	Two or less team members took an active role in the presentation.		X 1	
Total Points						