



2026

Livestock Evaluation

2026 Updates

Below is a summary of updates to the Livestock Evaluation 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

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.*

- Remove the 3 Keep Cull Individual Activities and add 3 additional Livestock evaluation/placing classes.
- The 150 points from the 3 Keep Cull Individual Activities will be added to the Livestock evaluation/placing classes.
- There will be up to 12 classes of four animals placed using a computerized scorecard.

Rationale: *Adding 3 placing classes for the 3 keep-cull classes doesn’t require a significant change in how coaches train their teams.*

Access to high-quality animals is becoming increasingly difficult.

Access to hogs for the keep-cull class in 2025 was very difficult.

This change will result in 12 fewer animals being needed in 2026.

Nearly all other national livestock judging events did not include keep cull classes.

For example, the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest in Louisville is comprised of eleven (11) classes of livestock and the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest at the American Royal in Kansas City has ten (10) classes of livestock that will be judged.

Similar skills [AFNR Standard Animal Systems (AS.04.01.) Evaluate animals for breeding readiness and soundness and (AS.06.03.) Select animals for specific purposes and maximum performance based on anatomy and physiology.] are needed by the students to place 4 animals (traditional placings) and to select 4 animals from a group of 8 (keep-cull).

- Oral reasons classes may be breeding or market animals from beef, swine, sheep or meat goat species.

Rationale: *Each species is represented in the Oral reasons, and the performance class can still be one of the choices.*

- The total points for individuals (800 points) and teams (3250 points) will not change.
- The 3rd tie breaker will change to the lower total placing score in the reasons classes.

Refer to the National FFA Career and Leadership Events webpage on FFA.org for the most up-to-date career and leadership development handbook edition.

CONTACT

Career Development Events
Education Specialist
National FFA Center
6060 FFA Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46278
cde@FFA.org

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/x6l2lkovv4x9tgiegq73mei30zvliip5i>

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/hrxlqvw7g6zo54xfi5x5ktylusqjhy0). You may access the standards alignments for this event at <https://ffa.app.box.com/s/hrxlqvw7g6zo54xfi5x5ktylusqjhy0>.

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).

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.

- 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.
- 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 livestock evaluation career development event provides the opportunity to learn and apply livestock industry and production priorities through evaluating and selecting beef cattle, swine, sheep and meat goats.

Objectives

Participants in the National FFA Livestock Evaluation Career Development Event will be able to

- Make accurate observations of livestock.
- Determine the desirable traits in market and breeding livestock.
- Make logical decisions based on these observations.
- Discuss and defend their decisions for their placings.
- Understand desirable selection, production, management and marketing techniques for livestock.
- Understand and interpret the value of performance data based on industry standards.
- Select and market livestock that will satisfy consumer demands and provide increased economic returns to producers while meeting the needs of the industry.
- Proficiently communicate using the terminology of the industry and the consumer.
- Associate with professionals in the industry.
- Utilize current technology as it relates to the livestock industry.
- Develop employability skills for future agricultural career choices.

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 scores will be used to determine the total team score.
- It is highly recommended that participants wear FFA Official Dress for this event.
- Event information may be added or deleted as changes occur in the livestock industry. When new criteria are adopted, the information will be forwarded to all states by Jan. 1 of the event year by the national FFA program manager responsible for career development events.
- Participants will report to the event superintendent or designee for instructions at the time and place shown in the current year's team orientation packet.
- Any participant possessing an electronic device in the event area is subject to disqualification.

Event Format

EQUIPMENT

Materials students must provide:

- Two No. 2 pencils.

Equipment provided by National FFA:

- All paper and clipboards will be provided. Participants are not to bring any paper or clipboards. Each participant will receive a clean steno notebook the morning of the event.
- Any other necessary materials, such as performance data, will be provided by the event committee.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES (200 POINTS)

Livestock evaluation/placing classes (50 points/class, up to 600 points total)

Up to twelve (12) classes of four animals will be placed using a computerized scorecard. Classes may be breeding or market animals from beef, swine, sheep or meat goat species. At least one class will include the use of production/performance data.

Oral reasons (50 points/class, 200 points total)

Oral reasons classes may include breeding or market animals from beef, swine, sheep, or meat goat species. The event superintendent will designate four classes for oral reasons at the beginning of the event. One set of reasons will be given in a production data class. Reasons will be given after all classes have been placed. Participants will be provided with steno notebooks to take notes in preparation for reasons classes. The use of notes during the reasons presentation is strongly discouraged.

TEAM QUESTIONS (50 POINTS)

Team members will work collaboratively to answer 10 questions drawn from a live animal class, including a scenario and performance data. Questions will be asked between rounds, and team members will have time to review their notes and collaborate on the answers.

Scoring

All team member scores will be used to determine final team placing.

Activity	Individual Points	Team Points
Classes – Up to 12 at 50 points each	600	2,400
Reasons – 4 at 50 points each	200	800
Team questions class		50
MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS	800	3,250

TIEBREAKERS

If ties occur, the following events, in order, will be used to determine individual and team outcomes:

1. Total of oral reasons.
2. Total of placing classes.
3. Lower total placing score in the reasons classes

Awards

Awards will be presented to individuals and teams at the awards ceremony based on their rankings. The individual and the team scoring the highest in each livestock species and oral reasons will receive special recognition. The top five team scores in the team activity will receive a certificate.

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](#).

References

This list of references is not intended to be all-inclusive. Other sources may be utilized, and teachers are encouraged to use the best instructional materials available. The following list contains references that may prove helpful during event preparation.

- National FFA CDE Question and answers, FFA.org past class listings, performance data and scenarios
- Beef Improvement Federation, www.beefimprovement.org - resource center
- National Swine Registry, <http://www.nationalswine.com/>
- Certified Pedigreed Swine, <http://cpsswine.com/>
- National Pork Board, <http://www.pork.org/>
- Flanders, Frank, Gillispie, James R. Modern Livestock and Poultry Production. (most current edition.) Albany, NY: Cengage Learning, 2015. ISBN 9781305483156
- Goat Handbook, <http://www.texasgoat.com>
- <https://thejudgingconnection.com/>
- www.livestockjudging.com
- Evaluating meat goats, <https://www.four-h.purdue.edu/downloads/cde/meat%20goat%20selection2.pdf>
- <http://judgingpro.com/>
- Rayfield, John S., Smith, Kasee L., Park, Travis and Croom, D. Barry. Principles of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources. (most current edition.) Tinley Park, IL; Goodheart-Willcox Publisher, 2023. ISBN 978-1-63776-096-3

Animal Science Related Careers

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| • Agricultural lender | • Geneticist |
| • Agricultural policy professional | • Herdsman |
| • Agriculture teacher | • Livestock auctioneer |
| • Animal science technician | • Livestock buyer |
| • Attorney | • Livestock judging coach |
| • Breed representative | • Nutritionist |
| • Collegiate educator | • Producer |
| • Commodity broker | • Researcher |
| • Commodity professional | • Sales and/or marketing representative |
| • Consultant | • Transportation logistics |
| • Extension agent | • Veterinarian |
| • Farm/ranch manager | |