

American Farm Bureau® Federation
Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet

JUDGES' MANUAL

2025



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Thank you for sharing your time to serve as a judge for the American Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet. This manual will give you the context you need to successfully judge this event.

Thank you to staff of Kansas, Michigan, New York, Virginia and Wisconsin Farm Bureaus, each of whom submitted content for this manual.



If you'd like to watch a recording of a Discussion Meet Final Four, please visit: **fb.org/competitiveevents**

American Farm Bureau® Federation (AFBF) Mission Statement

The American Farm Bureau Federation is the Voice of Agriculture®. We are farm and ranch families working together to build a sustainable future of safe and abundant food, fiber and renewable fuel for our nation and the world.

Young Farmers & Ranchers Program

The purpose of the AFBF YF&R Committee is to engage young Farm Bureau members between the age of 18-35 by offering opportunities to develop as strong, effective leaders for service in both Farm Bureau and their communities. The program is focused on personal growth in the areas of public speaking, issue advocacy, business development, networking, servant leadership, media training and telling the story of agriculture. As part of this program, the AFBF YF&R Committee implements the Discussion Meet and Collegiate Discussion Meet competition.

About the Discussion Meet

Farm Bureau's strength depends on its members' ability to analyze agricultural issues and decide on solutions that best meet their needs. Discussion Meet and Collegiate Discussion Meet is a competition designed to build these crucial skills in young, active farmers and ranchers. By participating, members build basic discussion skills, develop a keen understanding of important agricultural issues and explore how groups can pool knowledge to reach consensus and solve problems.

As a leadership training and self-improvement activity, the Discussion Meet experience will:

- Stimulate logical thinking and a desire for accurate information.
- Develop a concise and direct manner of speaking.
- Improve the ability to listen.
- Aid the participant in overcoming timidity or stage fright.
- Assist the individual in giving and receiving criticism in a productive way.
- Teach the value of compromise.
- Develop leaders for effective problem solving through group discussion.



Overall Philosophy of the Event

The Discussion Meet, started in 1948, is designed to replicate a committee meeting where participants explore an agricultural topic and ways to address it. All participants have known the topics for months, so they have had ample opportunity to come to the conversation prepared with information and innovative ideas to address the issues. But this is also a situation that requires people to adapt on the fly as others share similar, or opposing, ideas to the ones they have prepared. The same is true of a typical meeting – some things you come in prepared to say, other things are developed in response to the comments of others. Therefore, if someone is contributing only facts, only ideas or only questions, they are not fully prepared for a collaborative discussion. The goal of the event is to recognize those who understand the issue AND actively contribute ideas and effective solutions to change the situation AND work well with others AND clearly communicate their thoughts.

At the end of the day, the winner of the round should be the individual you would want to serve on an actual committee or board with. Think about what that looks like and don't lose track of it. You might not agree with every point they make, but they are likely someone who adds value to the conversation, is willing to listen to others and appreciates differing perspectives, looks for consensus and tangible next steps, exudes professionalism and is generally pleasant to work with, even when you disagree.

The Ideal Competitor

The rubric provides detailed information about a successful competitor, but in general, here's what we're looking for:

- **Knowledgeable:** We're looking for someone who provides real facts, figures and context to the conversation. Polish is great, but we're looking for someone with real knowledge, innovative ideas and a cooperative mindset. We are looking for both the ability to analyze the problem and develop a specific plan to solve it. Just because someone talks a lot, doesn't mean they should win.
- **Collaborative:** The Discussion Meet is a collaborate approach to problem solving, not a panel discussion and not a debate. We are not looking for the person who can recite the most random facts from their research, but the person who can build on the ideas of others. Competitors don't have to agree; it's OK to take a different stance and respectfully agree to disagree. We're looking for folks who can help guide the conversation as it moves from analyzing the topic to identifying innovative solutions and action plans, ensuring that all voices and perspectives have been heard along the way.
- **Articulate:** We're looking for someone who can convey their ideas clearly and confidently using appropriate vocal variety, stories, gestures and other presentation techniques to create a compelling message.

Competition Structure & Flow

- **Topics:** Each round of the Discussion Meet focuses on one agricultural topic. The topics are developed by the AFBF YF&R Committee, approved by the AFBF Board of Directors and announced several months before the competition.
- **Rounds:** All participants compete in two opening rounds of the Discussion Meet. The top 16 move on to the Sweet 16 round, and the top four competitors advance to the Final Four round. Each judge will evaluate only one round.
- **Moderator:** A moderator will provide opening comments and facilitate the start and end of the competition. A timekeeper in the front row will help keep the event on track.
- **Opening Statement:** Each contestant begins with a 30-second opening statement. This statement introduces the topic at hand, conveying why it's an important topic for agriculture to consider and expressing excitement for the conversation. This segment should be prepared and polished and should be addressed to the other competitors and the audience.
- **Discussion:** The participants discuss the topic for 25-30 minutes, depending on the round. Contestants should thoroughly analyze the topic, which might include why the issue is a concern, the historical and social context of

the issue, any relevant Farm Bureau policy, and/or personal stories and examples. After a thorough analysis, the participants should transition into problem-solving mode, working together to identify and evaluate solutions and then develop action plans to achieve the solutions. Ideally the group will reach innovative and specific solutions to address the topic. Hopefully Farm Bureau and/or YF&R specifically, at the local, state or national level, is a part of the solution. This should be a cooperative discussion always moving the group forward, connecting ideas and information into usable solutions. This is a discussion, not a debate.

- Closing Statement: Each contestant has one minute to formulate their one-minute closing statement. This statement, addressed to the audience, summarizes the full discussion and talks about the next steps to implement these solutions. The closing statement isn't a time for new information. Rather, it's a synopsis of what just happened and what happens next. The statement should not be, or sound, rehearsed.
- Scoring: Judges will be dismissed to a private room to tally their scores and compile feedback for each competitor.

Your Role During the Discussion Meet:

- If you are a Final Four judge, please do not watch any earlier round of the competition.
- Please arrive in your assigned competition room 15 minutes prior to the start of the competition.
- When you arrive in your assigned room, find a YF&R Committee member (hard, white name badge) and introduce yourself. It's important that they know that all the judges have arrived. They will provide you with the names of the competitors in your room.
- There will be two tables set in a slight "V" shape in the front of the room for the competitors. There will be four to six competitors in each room. The audience will be seated facing these tables.
- Find a seat where you can easily see and hear the competitors. Many judges prefer an aisle seat, so they have a little extra elbow room. Do not sit next to another judge; instead space yourself throughout the room.
- Review the rubric and scorecard one more time. Label your scorecard with the competitor names in the same order that they are seated on stage. The competitors will



A Note about Farm Bureau Policy

As you may know, Farm Bureau has a grassroots policy development process. Each year, at the county, state and national levels, voting delegates, who are elected by farmer members, gather to debate and vote upon the policy positions that will guide the organization's efforts for the coming year. These policies reflect the organization's positions on a variety of issues ranging from taxes to trade, technology, education and regulations. Discussion Meet competitors should be aware of Farm Bureau's policy on topics related to the proposed questions. It's OK if competitors disagree with current policy; policy development is an iterative process, and our grassroots members decide annually what new policies are needed and what current policies may need to evolve. Our policies reflect the position of a majority of the voting delegates, and therefore it's important that any disagreements are voiced in a respectful and productive way.

have already placed their name tents at their seats, and if you can't make out the name use the paper the committee member provided you when you checked in.

- It's helpful to make a few descriptive notes about each competitor to help you remember them when you are in the tabulation room. (For example, Sue: red blazer; Steve: pink tie).
- Some judges just take notes during the actual event and do all their scoring in the tabulation room. Others like to do some scoring as they go, assigning points to the opening statements as soon as they happen, for example.
- At the end of the competition, you will be introduced as a judge and excused from the room to move to the tally room to complete your scoresheet. The moderator will mention your name but not your affiliation.

Scoring

- The rubric on pages five and six gives detailed information about how the competitors should be scored.
- You will give a score to each competitor up to the maximum points for each category, but you may not have any ties. (The maximum point value listed is available for each competitor and not to be distributed among the competitors.)

- You will enter your final scores for each competitor onto one scoresheet. See the sample on page seven of this manual.
- In addition to the raw scores, please indicate your rank of the competitors in the three categories that request a ranking (analysis, problem solving and cooperative attitude). These rankings must be aligned with the raw scores and are used as tie breakers. Place the raw score in the larger box in each row and the rank in the smaller box.
- Please tally your scores at the bottom of the sheet and indicate the overall rank for each competitor.
- Each judge scores individually. Judges do not confer or collaborate.
- When you are done, please sign your scoresheet and hand it to a YF&R Committee member. They will then tally the scores and rankings from all judges to determine the winner.
- Using the feedback survey provided, type out feedback to each competitor on their strengths and areas for improvement. Alert a YF&R Committee member when you have completed the feedback survey for all competitors in your room.
- Please do not leave the tally room until you are excused by a committee member. We need to be sure your scoresheet has been completed correctly before you may depart.



Again, Thank You! You are an integral part of this leadership development event, and we couldn't do it without you!

We appreciate your time and expertise in judging this event.

Discussion Meet Scoring Rubric

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>(1) OPENING STATEMENT 10 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address the problem – is off topic. • Does not address the importance or relevancy of the problem. • Makes a “closed” statement that does not allow room for further conversation. • Does not seem to have a point of view. • Does not finish in the allotted time. <p>Award 0-3 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines the problem. • Sets the problem in context. • Makes a statement that leaves some room for further conversation but could be more open. • Has a general point of view. • Stays in the given time. <p>Award 4-6 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defines the problem. • Conveys the importance and relevancy of the problem. • Makes an “open” statement that leaves room for further conversation. • Sets the stage for an interesting conversation with a very clear point of view. • Uses their time very wisely and stays in the given time. <p>Award 7-10 points</p> |
| <p>(2) ANALYSIS OF TOPIC OR PROBLEM: 20 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address the problem or does not remain on topic/wanders/distracts. • Hasn't done much research or lacks quality facts. • Doesn't build on other's ideas, only pushes their own. • Doesn't ask questions to clarify other's ideas. • Doesn't share relevant personal examples. • Misinterprets the issue or does not display competency and therefore does not help with problem solving. • Is unaware of FB policy. <p>Award 0-5 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the causes of the problem, does not directly address them, but remains on topic. • Has done research. • Addresses the ideas of others but does not build upon them – or only drops in information they learned without connecting it to previous ideas and moving the conversation forward. • Asks some questions to help vet the ideas of others. • Shares relevant personal examples – may be slightly off topic. • Demonstrates knowledge of this problem but not why it exists. • Is aware of current FB policy. <p>Award 6-12 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and addresses the causes of the problem and remains on topic. • Has thoroughly researched the topic. • Confidently builds on the ideas of others to contribute to a coherent analysis. • Asks relevant questions to vet the ideas of others. • Shares relevant personal examples that add to the conversation. • Helps ensure thorough analysis before moving to problem solving. • Is aware of current and relevant FB policy. <p>Award 13-20 points</p> |

Discussion Meet Scoring Rubric (continued)

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>(3) PROBLEM SOLVING AND IMPLEMENTATION 25 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of helping to guide the conversation to a solution, just data drops. • Offers no plan for a solution or a generic plan like "tell our story" or "educate consumers." • Does not identify how Farm Bureau is involved. <p>Award 0-6 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tries to help lead the conversation to address a solution but misses opportunities to collaborate with the group. • Has a plan but is missing specificity. • Farm Bureau is mentioned but is not a crucial piece of the solution. <p>Award 7-16 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a leader in guiding the group and the conversation to specific and relevant solutions. • Generates ideas that contribute to an achievable and specific plan of action to resolve the issue. • Clearly defines how Farm Bureau is part of the action plan. <p>Award 17-25 points</p> |
| <p>(4) COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE: 15 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not listen to others – just waits for their turn to talk. • Cuts others off or simply repeats what others have already said. • Is rude, defensive or combative when they do not agree with others. <p>Award 0-4 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contestant listens to others but does not comment specifically on their ideas or tie ideas back to the bigger conversation. • Is respectful of others. • Is not rude or defensive when they disagree with others. <p>Award 5-9 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is an active listener and comments or references specific ideas mentioned by others tying them back to the bigger conversation. • Clearly shows grace, courtesy and respect to other participants. • Shows integrity especially when they do not agree with others. <p>Award 10-15 points</p> |
| <p>(5) DELIVERY: 15 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is boring/ mumbling/ monotoned. • Slouches, does not use appropriate gestures or have eye contact. • Ideas are difficult to understand, or they are not confident in speaking. <p>Award 0-4 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks at an appropriate volume and pace with appropriate tone. • Uses effective posture, gestures and eye contact. • Conveys thoughts and viewpoints but could seem overly rehearsed. <p>Award 5-9 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is interesting to listen to, animated and lively, speaks at an appropriate volume and with a professional and courteous tone. • Is poised and uses gestures and eye contact that emit respect and professionalism. • Confidently conveys thoughts and viewpoints clearly. <p>Award 10-15 points</p> |
| <p>(6) CLOSING STATEMENT: 15 pts.</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not accurately summarize the conversation. • Uses memorized speech that doesn't reflect the content of the conversation. • Closing statement is forgettable. <p>Award 0-4 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarizes the conversation that happened. • Uses take-away points from the discussion to help develop a plan. • Closing statement is memorable. <p>Award 5-9 points</p> | <p>Competitor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows that they have actively listened to the conversation in their summary. • Uses take away points from the discussion to develop relevant, realistic and specific action items and plans for the future. • Closing statement is memorable and inspires confidence in their ability to work toward a solution. <p>Award 10-15 points</p> |

Discussion Meet Scoresheet

Room Name: _____ Round # _____

Judge's Name: _____

Judge's Signature: _____ Room Chair's Name: _____ Room Chair's Signature: _____

In the first column, you will find the point values and descriptions. See rubric for additional detail. The total point value for each row is available for each competitor. You are not dividing the total points among competitor. **No ties.**

Columns to the right each represent a different competitor. Please fill in the first and last name of each competitor according to their seat location, from left to right starting with A. Put scores in the larger spaces and rank in the smaller boxes.

| | Comp A Name: | Comp B Name: | Comp C Name: | Comp D Name: | Comp E Name: | Comp F Name: |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| (1) OPENING STATEMENT: Defines problem; conveys importance and relevance; sets the stage for an interesting discussion; clear point of view; uses time wisely 10 pts. | | | | | | |
| (2) ANALYSIS OF TOPIC OR PROBLEM: Has thoroughly researched topic; builds on the ideas of others to help achieve coherent analysis; asks relevant questions; helps ensure thorough analysis before problem solving; aware of relevant FB policy 20 pts. | | | | | | |
| (3) PROBLEM SOLVING AND IMPLEMENTATION: Leader in guiding the conversation to specific and relevant solutions; has achievable and specific plan of action; clearly defines how FB is part of the action plan 25 pts. | | | | | | |
| (4) COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE: Active listener; comments on specific ideas mentioned by others and ties them back to the bigger conversation; shows grace, courtesy and respect to others; shows integrity especially when they do not agree 15 pts. | | | | | | |
| (5) DELIVERY: Interesting to listen to; animated; appropriate volume and tone; poised; uses gestures and eye contact; confident and clear 15 pts. | | | | | | |
| (6) CLOSING STATEMENT: Shows that they have listened to the conversation; develops relevant and realistic plans; memorable; inspires confidence 15 pts. | | | | | | |
| Total score for each contestant is to be tabulated by Judge. Any tie scores are to be broken by Judge. Total of 100 points possible. | | | | | | |
| Rank competitors: 1 (highest) through 6 (lowest). RANK | | | | | | |