

MICHIGAN 4-H & FFA Horse Judging Contest

Official Rules

The 4-H & FFA State Horse Judging Contest is held annually on the campus of Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. For more information please contact David Lindsay (lindsa75@msu.edu) or at (517) 353-1748

Horse Judging team entries will be entered online. **Entries should be completed and entries paid in full by Tuesday, March 31st.** Please check entries to ensure that members are in the correct age category and correct division. Members and coaches are responsible for accurate entries. Entries will be \$10 per participant. There are no refunds. County staff persons will be notified of team entry and will be responsible for providing volunteers for the event.

1. **Contest Objectives**

- A. To evaluate and rank horses
- B. Develop good judgment and keen observations skills to make accurate decisions
- C. Defend these decisions with logical oral reasons

2. **Eligibility**

- A. Contestants must **not have participated in any post-secondary coursework in the subject area of national 4-H competition** and must not have participated in training for post-secondary competition in the subject area of national 4-H competition prior to the contest.
- B. Teams qualifying for out-of-state competitions that have an open roster slot may have the opportunity to extend an invitation to an individual competitor (must have competed at 2026 4-H & FFA Horse Judging Contest to be eligible) from another county to join their team for the out-of-state competition. Any substitutions must be approved by State Extension Educator.
- C. **Cloverbud Division**
 - a. Cloverbud Age Requirements - Contestants must be at least 5 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year, and not be more than 7 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year.
 - b. Cloverbud participants will judge classes 3-6 only. Cloverbud participants will not be required to give reasons, but they are welcomed to. Cloverbud participants will answer questions. Following their 4th class, Cloverbuds will be dismissed.
 - c. Cloverbuds will not be scored but they will receive recognition at the awards ceremony. Cloverbuds' cards will be returned to coaches following the contest for review and to encourage feedback.
- D. **Novice (Junior or Senior) Division**
Will consist of members (all members) who have never competed in the State 4-H Horse

Judging Contest. Participation as a Cloverbud does not count as “previous participation”. Novice teams are not eligible for national or regional competition.

E. Junior Division

- a. Junior Age Requirements - Contestants must be at least 8 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year, and not be more than 13 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year.
- b. Junior teams are not eligible for national or regional competition.

F. Senior Division

- a. Senior Age Requirements - Contestants must be at least 14 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year, and not be more than 19 years of age on January 1 of the current calendar contest year.
- b. Eligibility rule: Senior members who have competed in an approved and authorized interstate contest (national or regional) in the same contest area, may not be eligible to represent Michigan again in the same approved and authorized national contest area, depending on the contest. **For example, 4-H members may only participate once at the Eastern National 4-H Horse Round Up in a given contest area.**
- c. **To participate in a national contest**, no contestant may be older than 19 years of age as of January 1 of the contest year, and they must be at least 14 on January 1 of the contest year.

G. All Divisions

Participants must be currently enrolled in a 4-H project in the Michigan county they represent and be approved by their County Extension staff person. This does not have to be the county in which they reside. This can also be a secondary county to their other 4-H projects. Members are not required to own a horse or pony to compete in this contest.

H. National and Interstate Competition

- a. All entries must be authorized by the Extension Youth Horse Specialist and/or the State 4-H Leader.
- b. In the event that an eligible team does not have enough available members to compete in the contest, they may add other members from their county with the approval of the Equine Extension Youth Specialist and appropriate county Extension staff members. These members must have competed in the current year's competition and meet all of the eligibility rules for that contest.
- c. The Top 20 youth in the Senior 4-H division will be eligible to participate in additional judging clinics and tryouts to be a part of a composite team who will attend the American Paint Horse Association HorseIQ Collegiate and Youth Judging contest. Youth who are in the Top 20 will receive a letter outlining the further details.

3. Number of Participants Per County

A. Each county may enter an unlimited number of teams plus individuals.

B. Each team can be made up of three or four members. When four are entered, the three team members with the highest scores will comprise the team total. Counties with less than three participants may enter them as individuals. All participants are eligible for individual awards.

4. **Registration**

The team coach should check in at the registration area prior to the start of the contest. Each participant will be assigned a number and given other pertinent items. The contest will be in progress most of the day. Participants cannot leave once the contest begins. **NO CHANGES WILL BE MADE THE DAY OF THE CONTEST.** (Only bookkeeping corrections from Event Staff)

5. **Talking**

While the contest is in progress, **THERE SHALL BE NO TALKING OR ANY OTHER TYPE OF COMMUNICATION** at all (phones, smart watches, etc.). This also includes the reasons preparation time in the designated area. Contestants will not be allowed to practice their reasons aloud. Furthermore, coaches not assisting with the contest will not be permitted in the contestant area while classes are being placed. Any violation of these rules may result in the members card (or cards) being pulled and/or disqualification of the offending individuals or teams.

6. **Scoring**

This shall be based upon the combined score of placings, oral reasons, and questions. Fifty points shall constitute a perfect score in each of the placing classes, and each of the sets of oral reasons. The sets of questions will have a maximum value of 50 points.

- In the Senior Regular Division, there will be eight placing classes, three sets of oral reasons, and three sets of questions for a possible score of 700 points per contestant, and 2100 points per team.
- In the Junior Regular Division there will be eight placing classes, two sets of oral reasons, and three sets of questions for a possible score of 650 points per contestant, and 1950 points per team.
- In the Senior Novice Division, there will be eight placing classes, two sets of oral reasons, and three sets of questions for a possible score of 650 points per contestant, and 1950 points per team.
- In the Junior Novice Division there will be eight placing classes, one set of oral reasons, and three sets of questions for a possible score of 600 points per contestant, and 1800 points per team.
- In the FFA division there will be six placing classes, two sets of oral reasons and one set of questions for a possible score of 450 per contestant, and 1350 points per team.
- Ties will be broken by using the following tie breakers in order: 1) Reasons score; 2) Questions score; 3) Placing score on reasons classes

8. **Classes**

A. Eight classes of four horses each will be judged. There will be halter and performance sections. The halter classes will be selected from the following breeds: Appaloosa, Arabian, Morgan, American Saddle Horse, Thoroughbred (suitable to become a hunter), Thoroughbred (suitable to become a dressage horse), POA, Paint, Palomino (Quarter Horse type), Quarter Horse, miniature horses and draft horses, although final selection

of breeds will depend upon availability of horses. There will be 2 halter classes in the arena at one time. Classes will be switched to opposite ends of arena after each class has been judged, so participants do not have to move. In addition, performance classes will be selected from the following: Western Pleasure, Saddle Seat Pleasure, Hunter Seat Pleasure (Hunter Under Saddle), Hunter Hack, Western Horsemanship, English Equitation, Suitable to Become a Dressage Horse, Western Riding, Trail, Reining, Ranch Riding, and Pleasure Driving. While backing horse in performance classes, they should be lined up on center line; only backed one time per horse.

- B. The showman of each horse in the classes will wear an appropriate number for identification purposes. All halter classes will be judged as sound of limb, eye, wind and mouth. Performance classes will be judged as seen (unsoundness to be penalized accordingly). All tack and attire is considered legal.

9. **Oral Reasons**

Senior Regular and Senior Novice Division contestants will give oral reasons on two of the halter classes, and one of the performance classes.

Junior and Junior Novice Division contestants will give oral reasons on one of the halter classes and one of the performance classes.

FFA contestants will give reasons on one halter and one performance class.

The contestants will not be permitted to use notes while giving reasons, but their placing cards will be returned to them during the time they are giving reasons.

Approximately 2 minutes will be allowed for a set of oral reasons.

10. **Questions**

All 4-H contestants will answer five questions each on two of the halter classes and one of the performance classes. Contestants will be allowed to use their notes while answering the questions, but the horses will not be present.

FFA Contestants will answer questions on ONE halter class.

11. **Rules**

Rules in 4-H Horse and Pony Project Show Rules and Regulations will be followed except as described in rule 8B above.

12. **Clothing**

Contestants should not wear clothing that identifies a school or county during the reasons portion of the contest. Hats should not be worn at any time.

13. **Length of Classes**

Approximately 17 minutes will be allowed to place each halter class, and approximately 15 minutes will be allowed to place each performance class.

1.)	Time limits for viewing horses in halter classes:	
	Front view	1.5 minutes
	Side view	3.0 minutes
	Rear view	1.5 minutes
	Side view	3.0 minutes
	Moving horse to view movement	4.0 minutes
	Close Inspection	4.0 minutes
	(2 minutes per 2 groups)	
	Total	17.0 minutes

14. **Group Leaders**

Contestants will be divided into several equal sized groups prior to the start of the contest. Each of these groups will be supervised by at least one adult group leader. Each contestant is to remain with his or her group throughout the contest and is directly responsible to the group leaders.

15. **Judging Procedure**

Horses will be judged primarily from the bleachers and will not be handled by the contestants. In halter classes, time will be provided for close inspection and to observe the horses' movement.

16. **Official Placings and Results**

As soon as the contestants finish giving their oral reasons, the official class placings and cuts will be announced. The official contest results will be announced during the 4-H Awards Program.

17. **Awards**

The following awards will be given:

Recognition & awards to all Cloverbud participants

Top 8 Scoring Individuals Overall in each of the four divisions

Top 5 Scoring County Teams Overall in each of the four divisions

Top 8 Scoring Individuals in Reasons in each of the four divisions

Top 5 Scoring County Teams in Reasons in each of the four divisions

Top 20 Scoring Senior Individuals will receive the opportunity to practice and try out for a composite team that will represent Michigan 4-H at the American Paint Horse Association HorseIQ Collegiate and Youth Judging contest

- **Top 2 Scoring Senior Individuals Overall:** Norma Agnew Memorial 4-H Horse Judging Scholarships (\$250.00 and \$150.00)

- **Top Scoring Junior Regular Individual:** Norma Agnew Memorial 4-H Horse Judging Award

18. **County Volunteers**

The State 4-H Horse Judging Contest is implemented with many adult and teen volunteers. These volunteers are group leaders, announcers, class chairmen, scoring helpers, runners, etc. Counties are asked to nominate Extension staff and parents to help and list their names on the form that will be sent out before the contest. All counties entered are expected to furnish at least 2 adults to assist with the contest. Coaches will not be assigned as group leaders.

19. Lunches

Lunches will be provided! There will be staff stationed to ensure that all participants receive their lunch as they enter their reasons area.

Counties who bring their own lunches must have all lunches packaged for each individual participant with their full name and county labeled on it for distribution by contest personnel during the contest.

2026 STATE 4-H AND FFA HORSE JUDGING CONTEST SCHEDULE

TALKING DURING THIS CONTEST CAN RESULT IN IMMEDIATE DISQUALIFICATION

Saturday, April 11, 2026

Farm Bureau Pavilion at Michigan State University

4301 Farm Lane, Lansing, MI 48910

8:00 - 8:30 a.m. Registration - Main Lobby of Pavilion

8:30 a.m. Orientation for all participants, coaches, volunteers, officials
Pavilion Auditorium

9:00 a.m. Judging Contest Begins
(*approx.*)

12:30 p.m. LUNCHES DELIVERED BY STAFF AS YOU ENTER REASONS AREA

ALL FFA Participants - Auditorium

All 4-H Participants - Arena

1:00 p.m. Oral Reasons Begin

ALL FFA (reasons) Participants - Auditorium

All 4-H - Arena

4:00 p.m. Official Reasons & Placings - Auditorium

(*approx.*)

Schedule of Classes
(classes subject to change due to horse availability)

Class Number	Class
1	Halter – Reasons Sr Regular
2	Halter – Place & Reasons (ALL contestants)
3	Halter – Place & Questions
4	Halter (Place and Questions)
5	Performance - Place & Reasons (All but Jr Novice)
6	Performance – Place and Questions
7	Performance – Place Only 4-H Only
8	Performance – Place Only 4-H Only

4-H Junior & Senior participants will judge all classes.

4-H Cloverbud participants will judge only classes 3-6. They will answer questions. They are not required to give reasons but are welcomed to. Cloverbuds will be able to sit and watch classes 1 & 2 where they will receive extra help & directions from their group leader or a designated coach/parent.

FFA participants will judge only classes 1-6.