



**National FFA Organization
Agricultural Issues Forum Career Development Event**

Helpful hints to give your students the best opportunity to do well in the agricultural issues forum career development event at the state and national FFA conventions.

- Identify specific things you as a teacher and the students will do to accomplish each objective stated in the National FFA Agricultural Issues Forum CDE guidelines.
- Include the *Focusing on Agricultural Issues* instructional materials as part of your regular classroom instruction. In the portfolio, you will be asked to state number of classes/students that received this instruction and some judges pay attention to this.
- Some teachers use Agricultural Issues as a joint project with the English and/or speech teacher. They can be small group class projects, with selection of the most interesting issues to be developed further.
- If you make it to the state and/or national level, the topic needs to be different from what your students presented the previous year. (In the national guidelines, this also applies to the advisor if the advisor changes schools.) All of the research needs to be done by the students during the current year.
- The topic presented as part of the Career Development Event needs to be relevant to your local community. It may be a local, state, national, or international issue. The students will be more excited with a topic that has meaning, and you will have a better chance of getting media coverage. Your title, stating your Agricultural Issue, should be in the format of a question.
- Forum presentations provide many benefits. First, high quality forums are the largest portion of the portfolio score. You can receive the maximum points in this section if your team has a minimum of five high quality forums that are properly documented. Second, you should present to organizations and individuals who are knowledgeable about your topic. They can help you refine the content of your presentation. More specifically, use the forum feedback to refine and/or add relevant content. Third, the stated objective is to inform members of the community about the pros and cons of a specific issue. Do as many high quality forums as you can. (At National, only forums conducted prior to the State qualification count in your score.)
- Forums are given the most points in the portfolio. Portfolio judges score forums on “quantity and quality.” Portfolio scores are added to the oral presentation score at each level of the competition.
- Note in the CDE guidelines that forums presented at the school to teachers and/or students will NOT count as documented forums. Yes, the school is a good place to practice, but one of the objectives is to have the forums presented in the community. It is your choice whether or not you list in-school presentations in the portfolio. The portfolio judges will not count in-school presentations in their scoring. Listing them may have a

positive influence on the oral presentation judges who read your portfolio prior to seeing your oral presentation.

- Document Forums Completely and Properly! You should provide dated letters from the organization or group you presented to, not copies of the letters you have sent to them. In the portfolio, provide a summary of the organizations you presented to along with the number of people in attendance. If a picture is taken, have it show as many people in the audience as possible. Do what you can to show that you had a positive impact in your community with these presentations/discussions. Forums not properly documented will not count in the score.
- Please, please pay attention to the above comments on proper and complete documentation. Arrange for your documentation soon after the presentation is held.
- If it is a state, national or international issue, consider having presentations to state level governing organizations. Let the local newspaper know about it before it happens so you help them give you positive press.

The Portfolio:

- Since the portfolio is limited to 10 pages total (not including the cover page), you can reduce documentation letters so multiple letters can fit on the same page.
- Submit your portfolio by the stated deadline date or the stated time to avoid penalty points. It is difficult for high presentation scores to fill the gap. (It's like being a college freshman, getting a "C" on the first exam and working hard enough to get an "A" in the course.) It's not impossible, but also not likely. Avoid penalty points by reading and following all of the stated guidelines.
- Proper grammar, correct spelling, and proper editing of text are important. The American Psychological Association (APA) style guide should be used for all research citations. Adherence to these editorial guidelines is expected to receive maximum points for the portfolio score.

The Presentation:

- Your 15 minutes will start when the first words are spoken. You can use music for a short mood-setting introduction. The music needs to fit your overall presentation.
- Your Agricultural Issue, which will be your Title, should be stated as a question.
- It makes no difference if you are in official FFA dress or in costume. What does make a difference is for the students to understand the topic, give a good presentation, be effective in answering questions and have a high score on the portfolio.
- The "Introduction" must clearly provide an overview of the issue.

- During the presentation, it must be clear if the speaker is “pro” or “con.” You can use the moderator to introduce them as a pro or con or have them state which side they are on during the first part of their comments.
- You can use a variety of methods to present the “Summary of Pros and Cons.” It will be to your advantage to have both the “List of Pros” and “List of Cons” visual aid available so the judges can see these summaries during the question and answer period. Also when they assign the points on the scorecard for Pro, Con and Summary (possible total of 60 points) they will see something to remind them what they heard. You have heard the presentation many, many times. They hear and see it once. If it is a complicated topic, do you really think they will remember everything? Help them be good judges.
- If you have a hand-out, realize you are making the judges choose between listening to what you are saying in the presentation or reading your hand-out.
- Proper citation of research during the presentation should follow the same style guide as recommended for the portfolio.
- Showcase Respect of all Cultures
The agricultural Issues CDE respects and promotes the practice of one's first amendment rights, however respect should always be demonstrated to cultures different from the speaker. In no manner should a team provide a forum that could be considered offensive to a culture different from themselves. Answers to questions should be answered with facts rather opinions or stereotypes. The definition of culture is broadly defined, therefore, it is recommended to consider all cultures as professionals. It is further recommended that teams present their forums to diverse audiences, including the dynamic of cultures represented in the presentation. By completing this task, written and verbal feedback should provide a quality measure on the cultural sensitivity of the forum.

Questioning:

- Line-up near the front of the “stage.” When you prepare to answer the question, step forward and stand comfortably. When you finish, step back.
- Make sure you understand the question. If you don't, ask for clarification.
- Be clear, be complete and be short with your response to the questions.
- Follow-up answers (second student answering the same question) are ok with-in limits. Do not use it as a stall tactic to limit the number a questions the judges can ask. If the judges feel like the question has been answered satisfactorily, they have been told that they can interrupt.
- Have each presenter answer at least one question. Points given for answering questions is typically what separates the top teams.

- In summary, the highest placed team will have both strong content and presentation. A relatively high portfolio score is necessary and the students must demonstrate their understanding of the issue during the question and answer period. Of the many different FFA career development events, the agricultural issues forum has the potential to be one of the most positive learning experiences available. It requires a lot of work, but you will receive a lot of positives.
- Finally, take time to attend the preliminary or semi-final rounds at the national FFA convention Wednesday morning or Thursday afternoon. The final four teams on Thursday afternoon can also be helpful, but good and bad ways of doing things can be learned by watching the earlier rounds.