

For Immediate Release

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Students Flex their Weed Science Muscles during National Collegiate Competition

LAWRENCE, Kansas – September 29, 2015 – Would you be able to identify 130 species of weeds and their seeds on sight? While for most of us the answer is a resounding “no,” many of the nation’s top student weed scientists proved they were up to the challenge during the recent 2015 National Collegiate Weed Science Contest.

Sixty-five teams from 25 schools participated in the event hosted by Ohio State University’s Agricultural Research and Development Center, including 140 graduate students and 73 undergrads.

Students competed both as individuals and as teams to tackle several tough challenges. They were asked to identify weeds at various stages of growth and development – from seeds to mature plants. During live role-playing sessions, they were asked to problem-solve weed management issues faced by farmers and land managers. They had to identify which of 30 herbicides had been used to treat various field plots based on visual indicators of impact on plants. Finally, they had to prove they could calibrate the sprayers commonly used in weed control – on the spot.

“It was a great day, with lots of enthusiasm from students, their coaches and the many volunteers who were there to help,” said Bruce Ackley, Ph.D., a weed scientist at Ohio State University and a co-chair of the event. “The caliber of the competitors was outstanding, and I can’t wait to see how their careers unfold.”

Winners included:

- Top graduate team: Purdue University (Pretap Devkota, Nick Harre, Joey Heueghan and Doug Spaunhurst)
- Top undergraduate team: University of Nebraska (Brad Meusch, Jacob Nikodym, Bret Rausch and Don Treptow)
- Top graduate student: Zachary Lancaster, University of Arkansas
- Top undergraduate student: Katelyn Vonn Treeck, University of Wisconsin

In addition to bragging rights, the winners will get a free registration and lodging during the Weed Science Society of America annual meeting to be held February 8-11, 2016, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Graduate student winner Lancaster, who grew up on a family farm in Arkansas, said he and his teammates began training months in advance. One of the biggest challenges they knew they would face were regional variations in crops, weeds and control measures. As the event approached, they were spending three to four hours a day in intense study to make certain they were prepared.

“I would have been right at home if we walked into a field of rice, but we knew we wouldn’t see that in Ohio,” he said. “We really had to get out of our comfort zone and learn so much information that we wouldn’t have otherwise. I know it will make us better-rounded weed scientists by broadening our experience.”

During the problem-solving portion of the competition, Lancaster was asked to troubleshoot soybean yield losses attributed to giant ragweed that wasn’t being adequately controlled by herbicides. “It took me about 10 minutes to figure out that the farmer wasn’t adding an adjuvant to his sprayer before applying the treatment,” he said.

Second and third place individual winners included: John Brewer of Virginia Tech, second place graduate student; Steven Boersma, University of Guelph, second place undergraduate student; Preetap Devkota, Purdue University, third place graduate student; and Brad Meusch, University of Nebraska, third place undergraduate student.

Second and third place team winners included: University of Arkansas, second place graduate team; University of Nebraska, third place graduate team; and two teams from the University of Guelph that took second and third place at the undergraduate level. Regional award winners are listed in the sidebar below.

Universities participating in the 2015 National Collegiate Weed Science Contest included: Cornell University; Iowa State University; Kansas State University; Louisiana State University; Mississippi State University; North Carolina State University; North Dakota State University; Oklahoma State University; Penn State University; Purdue University; Texas A&M University; University of Arkansas; University of California-Davis;

University of Guelph; University of Kentucky; University of Missouri; University of Missouri-Greenley; University of Nebraska; University of Tennessee at Martin; University of Tennessee; University of Wisconsin; University of Wyoming; Washington State University; Western Illinois University; and Virginia Tech.

About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a nonprofit scientific society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Society promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, fosters awareness of weeds and their impact on managed and natural ecosystems, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world. For more information, visit www.wssa.net.

Editor's note: A photo of the national winners can be downloaded at: <http://wssa.net/wp-content/uploads/2015-award-winners.zip>

Regional Winners in Collegiate Weed Competition

During the reception National Collegiate Weed Science Competition, awards were also presented to individuals and teams from each of the four regional weed science societies who logged the highest scores.

- *Western Society of Weed Science*. A graduate-level team from Kansas State University took top honors, as did a team from Nebraska State University at the undergraduate level. Individual winners were Chelsea Ahlquist, a graduate student at Kansas State, and Brad Meusch, an undergraduate at Nebraska State.
- *Northeastern Weed Science Society*. A team from Virginia Tech captured the top spot at the graduate student level, while the University of Guelph took top undergraduate honors. Individual winners were John Brewer, a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and Steven Boersma, an undergraduate at Guelph.
- *North Central Weed Science Society*. A team from Purdue University took first place at the graduate student level, while University of Wisconsin captured the top spot at the undergraduate level. Individual winners were Preetap Devkota, a graduate student at Purdue, and Katelyn Von Treeck, an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin.
- *Southern Weed Science Society*. National winner Zachary Lancaster of the University of Arkansas also took top honors at the graduate level in the Southern region. Nicholas Steppig from the University of Arkansas took top honors as an undergraduate. Teams from the University of Arkansas and the University of Missouri won their region at the graduate and undergraduate level, respectively.