



# Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers Youth Discussion Meet Contest Guidebook for 4-H and FFA

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## What is Discussion Meet?

The Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers (VAFB) Youth Discussion Meet is a special contest that helps individuals and groups build the skills necessary to create action plans for the betterment of the agriculture industry, their organization and/or their community.

The contest itself involves a moderator and contestants. The moderator's responsibility is to introduce the topic and the contestants, start the discussion, keep it on track if necessary and stop the contest when time elapses. The contestants discuss a pre-selected topic.

The contestant's responsibility is to exchange ideas and information to solve the problem addressed in the topic and to develop action plans for the solution. The contestant should attempt to cooperatively shed further light on the problem/topic and tentatively retain a flexible position for building agreement on solutions and actions. A successful participant is a productive thinker rather than an emotional persuader, who is free to state beliefs and change positions whenever additional information and ideas make that a reasonable thing to do.

Finally, this is not a panel discussion where each participant, in turn, makes a presentation, with the moderator ending the session. Rather, it is an exercise in cooperative problem solving, with the questions, answers and statements coming from any person, at any time.

The discussion should follow these steps:

1. State the problem or need, including any personal connections you may have to the issue.
2. Explore, define and understand the problem or need.
3. Identify causes or drivers of the problem or need.
4. Elaborate on viable solutions to the problem or need.
5. Evaluate and compare alternatives offered by the group.
6. Develop agreement or consensus (compromise) on what might be the best solution(s).
7. Arrive at ways to implement the solution into actions that resolve the problem or need.
8. Show leadership by summing up the high points of the discussion and the actions developed by the group.



## Why was Discussion Meet created?

The strength of Farm Bureau as the largest agricultural advocacy organization and the voice of agriculture is largely due to the involvement of members in analyzing their agricultural challenges and deciding on solutions that best fit their needs.

Experience has proven that Discussion Meet will provide an opportunity for greater participation on the part of young, active participants with an interest in agriculture. It helps them develop greater basic discussion skills and collaborative thinking. As a result, they will acquire a better understanding of how people can strengthen their actions and impacts by thinking in groups for the sake of solving challenges or problems at any level.

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

1. Stimulate logical thinking and a desire for accurate information.
2. Develop a concise and convenient manner of speaking.
3. Further develop the ability to listen.
4. Help the participant overcome timidity or stage fright.
5. Assist the individual in learning to give and receive ideas in a positive and gainful manner.
6. Teach the value of compromise.
7. Develop leaders for effective problem-solving through group discussion.

## The parts of a Discussion Meet

There are three main parts to the contest: 1) the opening statement, 2) the body of discussion and 3) the closing statement.

1. The opening statement is 30 seconds in length. The statement should be broad in scope, show relevancy and importance of the topic. Adding a personal connection is great!
2. The body of the discussion will typically last 15-20 minutes in length. During the body of the discussion, participants will background the topic, discuss why it is an issue, come up with solutions and develop actions that resolve the issue while being sure to add their involvement in their club/chapter and/or Farm Bureau as a part of the solution.
3. The closing statement is given at the end of the discussion after contestants are given one minute of quiet time to put their closing thoughts together. Closing statements should summarize the discussion and main solutions developed, then explain what actions will be taken to resolve the issue. The closing statement should not be "canned" or include pre-practiced statements, and will be completed in one minute or less.



## Who Can Compete?

Any 4-H or FFA member who is interested in agriculture, membership organization improvement and/or public policy, except past Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers Youth Discussion Meet state winners, are eligible to compete. Regional contests may be necessary for competition at the state level, so ***please refer to the 4-H or FFA Guidelines sheet that pertains to your organization for details on contest rules.***

**Orientation note:** Competitors, Judges, Timekeepers and Room Moderators will be given an orientation time based on the event location and logistics. Orientation must be attended to ensure any last-minute changes are announced and questions are answered. Anyone not attending orientation may be disqualified and replaced for any position in the competition. Orientation is equally helpful to all participants and ensures a fair competition for all.

## Contest Scoring

Contestants will be scored in six areas for a total of 100 points:

1. Opening statement (10 points)
2. Closing statement (15 points)
3. Delivery (15 points)
4. Problem solving and implementation (25 points)
5. Analysis of the topic or problem (20 points)
6. Cooperative attitude (15 points)

See the attached sample score card for specific areas of gaining points. Contestants should always remember that this is a discussion, not a debate.

## Contest Rounds

The typical contest includes a preliminary round where all participants will meet simultaneously on the first question announced in orientation. Rounds may include 4 to 8 participants seated at conference tables in the front of the room. (Some competitions may include two preliminary rounds if numbers and space dictate the need for two rounds)

The second or semi-final round will be conducted with the top 8 to 12 participants from the preliminary round(s) placed in two separate rooms and will be based on the question announced at the end of the last preliminary round.

The final round is also called "the Final Four" and will be made up of the top two competitors/participants from each of the semi-final rooms. The Final Four question may be announced when the top performers are announced. The winner in the Final Four round will become the champion of the competition!

**Contest Questions** were created and approved by the VAFB Young Farmers for the Youth Discussion Meet. Please see contest questions on the attached document.



## Detailed Competition Format

1. All competition facilitators and competitors will meet in the pre-assigned competition room 15 minutes prior to the start of the competition to receive last-minute comments by the room moderator or chair.
2. Competitors may not take prepared notes in any form with them to the competition table. After all competitors have been seated, notes may be written on the paper provided. If notes are brought to the table, the moderator will alert judges to a disqualification at the end of the round.
3. The competition question will be provided prior to the round, but will not be printed in the room or at the competition table.
4. The moderator will call the meeting to order, announce the topic to be discussed. Any competitor not present at their assigned round will be disqualified.
5. The moderator will introduce the competitors. He/she will give each of the competitors, in voluntary order, the opportunity to make a 30-second opening statement that is to be directed to the audience. Competitors proceed in voluntary order when they are ready.
6. The timekeeper will flash a red time card indicating when 30 seconds have elapsed. Judges may subtract points at their discretion for competitors who abuse the time limit.
7. The moderator will then indicate the opportunity for open discussion, which will continue for a total of 15-20 minutes depending on the type of competition and the level of round as announced in the rules and orientation. All discussion at this point should be directed only to the fellow competitors, not to the audience.
8. The timekeeper will indicate to the moderator when five minutes of open discussion time remains. If the discussion is lagging, the moderator may close the discussion at this time.
9. The timekeeper will indicate to the moderator when the discussion portion of the round has elapsed with a red time card. The moderator will call for open discussion to stop for one minute of quiet time, allowing the competitors to compose a closing statement.
10. After the one-minute quiet time, the moderator will give each competitor the opportunity to make a one-minute closing statement that is directed to the audience. Competitors will proceed again in voluntary order.

11. The moderator will recognize the judges and request they proceed to the tabulation room to finalize their scorecard. Judges are not to confer with each other until scorecards are collected and tabulated.

12. After the judges leave the room, the next round topic to be discussed will be announced (with some exceptions – please see rules for your competition).

13. The moderator will thank the competitors for a good contest, then ask them to share their personal background with the audience.

## Helpful Hints for Competitors

- Study as much material as possible that relates to the overall topic. Sources: Internet; library; newspapers; magazines; FFA or 4-H policies and programs; along with conversations with experts or knowledgeable people on the subject.
- Always remember that this is a discussion leading to solutions, not a debate where you try to win the argument.
- Be prepared to ask questions, listen to others and add to their ideas, state facts and opinions, and urge others to be specific.
- Be aware of the audience, but address only the panel during the discussion. Speak loudly enough to be heard by the whole audience.
- Participate whenever your contribution will further the discussion. Do not monopolize the discussion and always help the group stay on topic.
- Make notes of key points as the discussion proceeds for use in your closing statement.
- Use the one minute of quiet time to organize your closing statement.
- Always stand as you make your opening and closing statements to the audience. Use accepted speech techniques and stay within the time limits for each part.

***Please see the individual rules and guidelines for either 4-H or FFA competitions on a separate document to be sure you qualify in your respective competition.***

