



Science
Societies

Colorado State University hosts 2025 Northwest Regional Collegiate Soil Judging Competition

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Contest day for the Region 7 Collegiate Soil Judging Competition that took place Oct. 23–25, 2025 at Talbott Farms in Palisade, CO. Participants examine soil profiles on a colluvial hill slope (left) and an alluvial stream terrace (right). Photo by Susan Melzer.

Colorado State University (CSU) proudly hosted the 2025 Northwest Regional (Region 7) Collegiate Soil Judging Competition from Oct. 23–25, 2025 on Colorado's Western Slope. The event welcomed approximately 50 participants and took place at Talbott Farms, a 500-ac fruit orchard in Palisade, CO that produces peaches, pears, cherries, and grapes. Located within the Grand Valley on the northern edge of the Colorado Plateau and at the base of the Book Cliffs and Grand Mesa, the venue offered an exceptional and dynamic setting for the contest.

Soil judging is a hands-on educational experience that challenges undergraduate students to evaluate the physical and morphological properties of soils and interpret these findings for appropriate land-use recommendations. For students studying soil science, agronomy, or land management, soil judging provides an invaluable opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in the field, fostering both technical expertise and a deeper appreciation for the complexity and diversity of soils.

One persistent challenge in soil science education is access to suitable field sites that offer representative soil profiles for training and competition. Thanks to the collaboration between local producers (i.e., Fruit Basket Orchards, Carlson Vineyards, Talbott Farms), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and CSU's Agricultural Experiment Stations (i.e., Western Colorado Research Centers Orchard Mesa and Grand Valley), competitors were able to explore and analyze a wide range of soils representative of Colorado's diverse landscapes. Hosting and competing also would not have been possible without the generous additional scholarship support from the [Agronomic Science Foundation](#).

The competition was coordinated by Morgan "Duke" Williams, a CSU graduate student mentored by Dr. Susan Melzer and Dr. Eugene Kelly. Williams led a dedicated team of

CSU graduate and postgraduate assistants, including Lucas Leno, Ian Obanion, Tess Thompson, and John Blackwell. Their collective efforts included site selection, soil description, contest logistics, and pit proctoring and ensured a smooth and educational experience for all participants. This year's contest featured five official competition pits and eight practice pits excavated across varying landforms and parent materials to highlight the geological and pedological diversity of the region.



Representative soil profiles showing the variability of soils in the Grand Valley region of Colorado's Western Slope, including torriorthents (left), calcigypid (middle), and calciargid (right). Photo by Susan Melzer.

Over the past few years, Region 7 participation in soil judging has doubled in size. University teams from across the Northwest Region competed, including those from CSU, Oregon State University, the University of Idaho, Utah State University, and Washington State University. The event commenced on Thursday with practice pits in Grand Junction and Fruita, followed by an evening dinner and geology presentation by Dr. Eugene Kelly, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station and Associate Dean for

Extension in CSU's College of Agricultural Sciences. His presentation on the geologic and geomorphic processes shaping Colorado's Western Slope provided students with valuable insights that enhanced their field interpretations throughout the competition and as the students engaged in additional practice sessions on Friday before the official competition on Saturday.

In team rankings, the University of Idaho claimed first place, followed by Utah State University in second and Colorado State University in third. Top individual honors went to Tegan Macy (University of Idaho) for first and Lauryn Daniel (CSU) and Sky Reinhardt (University of Idaho) tying for second and third place. These results highlight the dedication and preparation of all competing teams. The top three teams will advance to the 2026 National Collegiate Soil Judging Competition, to be hosted by North Carolina State University in the spring.



The University of Idaho (top) took first place in the team competition. In individual competition, Tegan Macy (bottom left) took first place while Lauryn Daniel and Sky Reinhardt (bottom right) tied for second and third place. Photo by Tess Thompson.

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