



Soybean growing contest open to Kansas students

MANHATTAN, Kan. - Dec. 20, 2013 - The Kansas State University Department of Agronomy will host the 7th annual Manhattan and the 3rd annual Olathe "Willie and the Beanstalk" contests in 2014.

The contest challenges students to grow a soybean plant in a 40-day time frame. It is open to high school, middle school and elementary school, 4-H and/or FFA teams. There are two divisions for the contest: Kindergarten-8th grade division and a 9th-12th grade division.

Dr. Nathan Nelson, an associate professor of agronomy at K-State said the contest is a way to educate students about the growing process of soybeans. "Even more, it is an educational tool to teach students about the science involved in plant growth and all of the factors that go into growing a successful soybean plant," Nelson said.

The participants involved learn a number of agronomic parameters on plant growth such as the effects of temperature, genetics, soil, nutrients, potential disease or insect occurrences on the plant's growth success. Participants also are asked to keep detailed documentation on the plant's growth, the biomass, leaf area, chlorophyll index and other agronomic details.

As a sponsor of the contest since 2009, the Kansas Soybean Commission encourages students to learn about the impact of soybeans in the state.

"Kansas farmers planted 3.6 million acres of soybeans in 2013," Jerry Jeschke, chairman of the Kansas Soybean Commission said. "Of the 3.6 million acres, 3.5 million were harvested to produce 124 million bushels. At \$13 per bushel, which is the average Kansas price so far this marketing year, that's \$1.6 billion. In 2012, soybeans represented about 15 percent of Kansas' total principal-crop value."

With such an impact on the state's economy, future soybean research and development is essential. Students of this program may go into agriculture in college and their careers, in turn potentially improving soybean traits.

"The Kansas Soybean Commission sponsors the Willie and the Beanstalk contest because it teaches students about the science that goes into food and feed production," Jeschke said. "By focusing on the soybean life cycle and what makes for a healthy soybean plant, they explore the importance of soil fertility, genetics, light and water. Plus, they experience some of the challenges farmers face."

The Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (KFAC) provides lesson plans to teachers interested in educating their classroom about soybeans. The non-profit agricultural education foundation's mission is to connect classrooms to Kansas agriculture. The "Willie and the Beanstalk" contest fits that mission.

"Being a part of the Willie and the Beanstalk contest is a perfect fit for KFAC," Cathy Musick, KFAC executive director said. "We love knowing teachers and students are learning the importance of agronomic factors in the growth of a healthy soybean plant and applying math and science to the process."

The soybean plants will be evaluated based upon the following criteria: cultural practices documentation, plant height, plant mass, leaf area and leaf greenness. Plants within each division will be ranked based on the criteria, and prizes will be awarded for the top entries in each judging category. All entrants will receive a t-shirt. The entries will be judged on April 5, 2014 during the K-State Open House in Manhattan and April 12, 2014 during the K-State Open House in Olathe.

Willie and the Beanstalk registrations will open Feb. 1, 2014 with a deadline of Feb. 24, 2014. For contest rules, registration information and educational resources visit beanstalk.agronomy.ksu.edu or contact beanstalk@ksu.edu.

About KFAC

The Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom is a 501(c)(3) organization that seeks to involve Kansans of all ages in understanding the fundamental impact of agriculture on their everyday lives. By providing resources to Kansas teachers, KFAC hopes to connect classrooms to Kansas agriculture.

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