



Discussion Meet Contest Best Practices

1. Understand the Purpose:

a. Background: Most businesses and organizations have a top-down organizational structure, with a national headquarters dictating to the state organization which dictates to the local organization. The opposite is true for Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau is a bottom-up organization. The power of our organization is held and wielded at the local (county) level. Annually, each county Farm Bureau establishes a policy development committee and holds a policy development session to discuss current agricultural topics and issues.

The Discussion Meet contest mirrors our counties' policy development committee sessions. Thus, the contest judges are looking for cooperative and constructive discussion of the topic, leading to workable and actionable solutions – not a debate of the topic. The judges are looking for the person or persons who stand out as the committee chair.

b. Be recognized as the committee chair: A good committee chair is very cooperative. There are six criteria on the judge's scorecard:

1) Opening Statement (10 pts.)

Defines problem; conveys importance and relevance; sets the stage for an interesting discussion; clear point of view; uses time wisely

2) Analysis of Topic or Problem (20 pts.)

Has thoroughly researched topic; builds on the ideas of others to help achieve coherent analysis; asks relevant questions; helps ensure thorough analysis before problem-solving; aware of relevant FB policy

3) Problem Solving and Implementation (25 pts.)

Leader in guiding the conversation to specific and relevant solutions; has an achievable and specific plan of action; clearly defines how FB is part of the action plan

4) Cooperative Attitude (15 pts.)

Active listener; comments on specific ideas mentioned by others and ties them back to the more extensive conversation; shows grace, courtesy, and respect to others; shows integrity, especially when they do not agree

5) Delivery (15 pts.)

Interesting to listen to; animated; appropriate volume and tone; poised; uses gestures and eye contact; confident and clear

6) Closing Statement (15 pts.)

Shows that they have listened to the conversation; develops relevant and realistic plans; memorable; inspires confidence

NOTE: It is essential to make strong points during the discussion; however, it is also important to be seen as the Committee Chair.

2. Understand the Contest Structure:

The contest has an opening (30-second opening statement), a body (25 minutes of open discussion), and a closing (one-minute closing statement). A good model of logic to follow is: In the opening, tell them what you are going to say to them. In the body, tell them. In the closing, tell them what you told them.

a. Opening statement: In 30 seconds, it is critical to grab the judges' attention in the opening statement. This may be done by using a quote from a famous person who relates to the topic being discussed or by telling a quick personal story that makes an emotional connection with the judges. After a strong opening sentence, quickly outline the main points you would like to discuss during the 25- minute open discussion.

b. Discussion: In 25 minutes, it is critical to be seen as the committee chair. Lead the discussion using the sub-topics you have developed for each contest topic. Make your points and hand off the discussion by asking a question using a fellow contestant's name. Try to come at the issue from a unique point of view and make sure many points of view are discussed. When five minutes remaining, the timekeeper will display a yellow card. Try to bring the group to a consensus by developing workable and actionable solutions for the topic being discussed.

c. Closing statement: In one minute, it is critical to finish strong. Do this by quickly summarizing one main point made by the other contestants during the discussion. Don't use the closing statement to bring up a new point in the discussion that wasn't covered before. State what you believe is the best solutions and actions from the discussion to make the most significant impact. Make sure your final sentence is powerful and memorable.

d. Discussion Meet topics: There are five contest topics. Only three topics will be used at the Regional Discussion Meet contests. Only one topic will be used in the final round. One topic will not be used; however, you must prepare for all five topics. Create four to five sub-topics or sub-points you want to discuss for each main topic. Developing sub-topics will help you lead the discussion.

3. General Pointers:

a. This is a Farm Bureau contest: As a Farm Bureau member, YOU are Farm Bureau! So, when mentioning Farm Bureau, make sure you personalize your statements. "We as Farm Bureau members should..." or "As a Farm Bureau member, I suggest..." Make sure you know how the topic relates to Farm Bureau policy at the local (county), state (California Farm Bureau), and national (American Farm Bureau Federation) levels. Visit the CAFB website at www.cfbf.com and the AFBF website at www.fb.org. Check us out on Facebook and Twitter. How can you work within Farm Bureau to help solve the challenges arising from the topic being discussed?

b. Speaking style: The opening and closing statements are given standing and directed to the audience. Make sure to stand up with confidence and move behind your chair, push your chair in under the table, pause a beat to prepare yourself and the audience, and then start your statement. Make good eye contact with members of the audience. Finish your

statement, pause a beat, pull out your chair and be seated. Do not talk yourself out of your chair as you begin to speak or talk yourself down into your chair as you finish.

Most people talk faster than they think they do. This is especially true when nerves kick in during a speaking contest. Concentrate on slowing down and speaking clearly. Use a strong, clear, confident voice. Be aware of your facial expressions and body language.

Maintain a confident body posture and smile.

During the open discussion, sit confidently in your chair, make good eye contact with your fellow contestants, actually listen to what they have to say. Don't get focused on the following point you want to make. Think "yes, and..." to build on their points and the discussion.

c. Opening and closing statement strategy: The opening and closing statements are given in voluntary order determined by the contestants. Most people believe the judges best remember the first person to speak and the last person to speak. Those speaking in the middle may get lost in the shuffle.

Going first shows you are very confident. Just make sure you are mentally prepared to deliver a strong opening statement.

Sometimes there is gamesmanship among experienced contestants in an attempt to be the last person to speak. Remember, Cooperative Attitude is scored, so be careful not to be seen as uncooperative to secure the final speaking position. If you go last for the opening and/or closing statement, you better nail it because your statement will be remembered!

d. Use of personal stories and facts: Everyone loves a story. Tell personal stories that relate to the topic and make an emotional connection to your audience (the judges). Talk about your home farm or career, a lesson learned from your grandfather, your greatest challenge working with family, etc. Make it personal and make sure it relates to the topic.

Research the topic. Find some facts and figures you can cite to bring credibility to your thoughts. Don't go overboard on facts and figures - a few sprinkled into the discussion go a long way. Using too many facts and figures will bore your audience (the judges).

e. Stay on topic: You will only have four to six opportunities to speak during open discussion. When you speak, you must make strong points directly related to the topic. Don't get off-topic, and don't allow another contestant to lead the group off-topic. A good committee chair keeps the discussion on the topic.

f. Think outside the box and propose unique solutions: Research the topics from all points of view. Think about all sides and perspectives of the issue. Can you tackle this challenge from a direction no one else will consider? Having a unique perspective on solving the challenge will serve you well. Don't just take the farmer or ag professional's point of view. How will this affect consumers, suppliers, senior citizens, young people, ag educators, land grant universities, those who don't understand farming and ag, those trying to vilify farming and agriculture, etc.?

Avoid the “education” trap. Almost every topic lends itself to the solution of “We just need to educate....” Most judges roll their eyes when they hear “more education” for the 99th time. If you are going to suggest, “We need to educate...” you better come up with a unique way of delivering that education because the judges have heard all the usual methods, and they are not going to be excited to hear it again.

g. Be careful about using acronyms or farm/ag terms your audience (the judges) may not know or understand: If you mention HSUS and PETA, you must first say, “The Humane Society of the United States, known as HSUS.” or “The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, known as PETA.” Once you’ve said the complete name, then you may use the acronym from that point forward. Don’t expect all judges will know what a gilt or a gelding is. If you use ag-terms such as those, you need to explain what you are talking about briefly.

h. Use proper English: Watch your use of “umm,” “like,” “you know,” “ya,” “nope,” “cuz,” “I think” (if you are speaking, we know you think that. Stating the obvious weakens what you are saying.)

i. Attire: Women should wear business dress: a dress, a pantsuit, or blouse, jacket and skirt. Wearing bright colors or, at a minimum, a bright-colored top works best for women. Men should wear business dress: a suit and tie or sports jacket, business slacks, and tie.

Farm Bureau Discussion Meet Prep Guide

Topic: _____.

30 Second Opening Statement:

Quote/Story/Impact Statement:

Three points of I want to discuss:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Discussion

Personal Connection/Story

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Impact Statistics/Relevant Research

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Connections to Farm Bureau

1.

2.

3.

Questions that I can ask

1.

2.

3.

1 Minute Closing Statement

Connection to opening statement

3 Summary Points of Discussion

1.

2.

3.

Action Plan

General Resources and Websites

- **Training calls.** All competitors are encouraged to join the training calls hosted by the AFBF YF&R committee in the fall. Specific dates and times will be announced in late summer/early fall. There will be a total of three calls. The first call will cover the Discussion Meet format and tips for success; the other two calls will focus on the Farm Bureau policy related to the Discussion Meet questions. Often the calls include industry experts, who share their expertise and provide additional resources.
- **Utilize government research.** Search government agency websites and databases for strong statistics and data to use in your discussions. This information is reliable and well-researched.
- **Learn from the best.** Reach out to former Discussion Meet and Collegiate Discussion Meet participants. Even though the discussion questions change each year, former competitors can provide valuable insight and tips on the nature of the contest. Also, reach out to YF&R staff and committee members who have familiarity with the competition to get clarification.
- **Pros and Cons.** Review each question and create discussion points from both sides of the issue. This will not only give you greater understanding of how an issue developed, but it will prepare you to discuss potential obstacles when working to find a solution.
- **Diversify written sources.** Besides the internet, gather resources and information from the library, newspapers, magazines, Farm Bureau policies and other agriculture publications.
- **Real talk.** Engage in conversations with your local county Farm Bureau members, state and national representatives, lobbyists and agriculture industry employees to gather information and examples. Seek conversations with those who are not familiar with the issue to gain their perspective. Explaining the topic helps provide practice articulating what you know. As you speak, address all angles to gather additional points and as many ideas as possible.
- **Farm Bureau history and policy.** Take time to review county, state and American Farm Bureau history and policy on the topic. What are our standing policies with the questions?
- **Expert opinion.** If you don't have a personal relationship with the content of the question, find a credible source who does and get their opinion. Be prepared to cite and properly establish your source as an expert in their field.

Farm Bureau:

- [American Farm Bureau Federation](#)
 - o [Issue Backgrounders](#)
 - o [Farm Bureau Advocacy Action Center](#)
- [American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture](#)

Government:

- [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)
 - o [National Institute of Food and Agriculture \(NIFA\)](#)
 - o [Cooperative Extension Service](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency - Agriculture](#)
- [National Association of State Departments of Agriculture](#)
- [Selected Federal Agencies with a Role in Food Safety](#)
- [GovTrack.us](#)
- [Farmers.gov](#)

Media:

- [Farm Journal Media](#)
- [AgDaily](#)

Other:

- [American Farmland Trust](#)
- [American Lands Council](#)
- [Animal Agriculture Alliance](#)
- [Beginning Farmers](#)
- [National Agriculture in the Classroom](#)
- [U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in ACTION](#)