
Consumer Decision-Making Contest Essentials

The 4-H Consumer Decision-Making Contest is a competitive event in which participants are given information about a situation and then make decisions based on four marketplace options.

This contest offers an opportunity for 4-H'ers to practice and apply the knowledge and skills that they gained in the consumer education project by comparing their decisions with those of a panel of judges who are knowledgeable about today's marketplace and its various goods and services.

Basics

The consumer decision-making contest is a team event with teams of three or four members. The contest has two parts—ranking consumer options, and giving oral reasons for the decisions made.

For each class being judged, the contestants study the information provided in the scenario. Then they assume the role of the consumer in the situation and decide which choice is best.

The participant first ranks four options in a consumer scenario. Each scenario and its four options are a class, and the contest includes several classes. A study guide (released annually) is available for each class.

One product in each class will best meet the consumer needs described or assumed by the situation statement; however, another product will be almost as desirable, and the other two will meet the standards to lesser degrees. Ranking the four items in order, according to how well they meet the needs of the consumer, is called placing.

The second part of the contest is giving oral reasons for the decisions made. Individual contestants will explain why they decided on a certain placing. The ability to give oral reasons comes from experience in making comparisons and decisions and from a thorough knowledge of the product information for the class.

Conducting the contest

A consumer decision-making contest requires much planning. A planning guide is available for your task force members.

Space and equipment

- Hormel slide (a manual judging calculator) for determining the point value of each placing. This may also be done online as instructed in the *Consumer Decision Making Contest Guide*.

Rooms

- 1 large room for group assembly and awards
- 1 large room to accommodate separate tables for each class
- 1 room for tabulation
- 1 room for each reasons class.

Tables

- 1 table per class to display the four options for each situation and a copy of the scenario for each contestant
- Possible locations are schools, churches, community centers, county fair buildings, or county Extension office.

For each contestant

- 1 placing card per contestant for each class to be judged, or one Scantron card or other method used for placing each class
- 1 name or contestant number tag
- Cards for taking notes in reasons classes
- Contest schedule
- Time schedule for giving reasons

Volunteers needed

- **Class monitor:** Watches the 4-H members as they judge each class, collects placing cards and directs contestants to the next class to be judged; between classes, straightens the four options
- **Judges:** Score contestants' presentations of oral reasons

-
- **Runners:** Take placing cards and reasons scorecards from judging rooms to the tabulation room
 - **Situation statement writers and shoppers:** Members of the contest planning committee may help with these responsibilities as long as it does not interfere with the integrity of the contest
 - **Study room monitors:** Supervise contestants who are studying before giving oral reasons
 - **Tabulators:** Tabulate placing scores and reasons scores
 - **Timekeeper:** Keeps time during judging and indicates when contestants should rotate to the next class

Conducting the contest as a learning experience

4-H clubs and project groups can use the consumer decision-making contest as an informal educational activity. It can be a great way to conclude a consumer-education project meeting or workshop. The members can test their knowledge while also learning about the consumer decision-making contest.

Organize the contest in these steps:

- Select the classes for the mock contest and/or learning experience.
- Write a situation statement for each class. The information could include the buyer of the product, buyer's age, budget allowance for the purchase, use of the product after purchase, user's age if different from the buyer's, and any specific product criteria.
- Choose four items in a class with important differences. The items may be drawn from advertisements, catalogs, or Internet sources.
- Label the items in each class #1, #2, #3, #4. Add a price tag showing the total purchase price for each item.
- Arrange the four items in the class on a table, close enough together to allow for convenient comparison.
- Have judges place the class of products according to the criteria described in the situation.
- After placing, the judges determine the "cuts." The cuts give a numerical rating to the differences in how well the three pairs of products satisfy the criteria. The smaller the difference between the products in a pairing, the smaller the cut. The larger the difference, the larger the cut. The numerical total for the cuts cannot be more than 15. The Hormel slide, or its online equivalent, is used to determine official scores for each class.
- Divide the group into two teams of three to four members.
- Conduct a mock contest. If the 4-H members are new to the contest experience, you may want to talk through the reasons as a group instead of having each 4-H member give a set of oral reasons.

Team selection

Develop a systematic way to track each 4-H member's progress. Establish written guidelines for team member selection at the beginning of the project work. Work with your FCS Consumer Education Project Task Force to develop a set of written team-selection guidelines.

If enough people are interested, you could hold a county-level qualification event to determine which 4-H members will represent the county in the district contest. The qualifying event could be for:

- Club teams
- Mixed club teams
- Individuals, with the top four scorers in each age division forming the county teams
- Individuals who take written quizzes, with the high-scoring individuals in each age division forming the county teams

Resources

- *4-H Consumer Decision Making Contest Study Guide:* texas4-h.tamu.edu/projects_consumer/cdm/
- Online score calculation: www.judgingcard.com/resources/hormel.aspx

Specialists

- Andy Hart, Extension Program Specialist, amhart@ag.tamu.edu, 806-746-6101
- Luis Saldana, Extension Program Specialist, l-saldana@tamu.edu, 956-968-5581