Groom & Clean Contest Rules (Updated 1/1/26)

GENERAL RULES:

1. Contestant Eligibility

a. Each contestant must be currently enrolled in a 4-H or FFA Horse project, a member in good standing with the county they represent, and have successfully completed the current year's EquiSTEP by the contest registration deadline.

b. Junior contestants must be at least 8 years of age and in third grade and under 14 years of age as of January 1st of the current year.

c. Senior contestants must be at least 14 years of age on January 1st of the current year, and not be more than 18 years of age on January 1st of the current year.

d. Contestants are allowed to compete in this contest in subsequent years.

2. Teams

a. Each team consists of three members.

b. Each county may enter only one Junior team and one Senior team in the state contest.

c. Junior contestants may compete on a senior team as long as the other two members of the team are senior contestants. Senior contestants may not compete on a junior team.

d. All team members must wear hard-sole, closed-toe shoes (*i.e.,* boots, sneakers) and long pants during the contest. Long skirts are permitted for religious reasons.

e. Clothing that identifies a team's county or club is not allowed.

f. No attire change will be allowed. Contestants must start and finish the competition in the same outfit. Hats may still be optional during showmanship; however, must not be worn during the grooming portion.

g. No gloves or coveralls may be worn. Gloves or dust masks may be used while grooming if for medical reasons.

h. Each team is responsible for muddying their own horse.

3. Handlers

a. Handlers holding the horse during the contest must be 18 years of age or older.

b. Handlers must wear hard-sole, closed-toe shoes (*i.e.,* boots, sneakers) during the contest.

c. Clothing that identifies a team's county or club is not allowed.

d. Handlers must have control of the horse/pony at all times. They will maintain a safe distance between horses/ponies and move the horse/pony (after telling team members) only as needed for safety.

e. Handlers will not coach the team members in any way. They will speak to team members only when necessary to maintain safety. Any coaching from the handler, or spectators, will result in disqualification of the team.

4. Horses

a. Each team must provide their own horse/pony for the contests.

b. Horses/ponies must be 13.2h or taller.

c. Horses must be a minimum body condition score of 4 (on a scale of 1-9).

d. Grooming products that make it easier for dirt to be removed from the hair coat (i.e., Show Sheen) are strictly prohibited prior to or after being muddied.
e. Each horse/pony must arrive wearing a properly fitted flat nylon or leather halter. Silver show halters or rope halters are not allowed.

MUDDYING

a. At least two hours before the scheduled start, team members will apply the mud uniformly over the horses/ponies under the supervision of the superintendent. Allow more drying time if the weather is damp.
b. The horses/ponies will be dirtied using mud (sandy mud does not work). Never put mud in body openings or tight places (*i.e.*, in the ears, between the rear legs).
c. Grooming of any horse participating in the contest after muddying and prior to the grooming portion of the contest by any person will result in the disqualification of the team associated with that horse.
d. If the horse is not sufficiently muddy at the start of the competition, the team may be penalized. If the horse does not have sufficient length of mane at the start of the competition, the team may be penalized. If the horse has a roached mane, the team may be severely penalized.

CONTEST PROCEDURES

1. Written Test

a. The written test may be given while the judges are evaluating the muddied horses/ponies or whenever determined to be convenient.
b. All three members of each team will take a written test covering information from the following references:
   Basic Horse Management (174)
   Horses, Safety, and You (191R)
   Light Horse Selection (175)
c. All electronic devices are prohibited during the written test. Any youth observed with an electronic device during the written test will receive a score of 0 for that portion of the contest.
d. A test reader will be available for any youth that needs the test read aloud to them.
e. The total time allowed for the test is 15 minutes. Teams are told when 10, 5, and 2 minutes remain.

2. Grooming

a. Each team will provide its own grooming tools (see required grooming kit list). No electric or battery powered equipment may be used.
b. The total time for grooming is 30 minutes. Teams are told by the announcer when only 10, 5 and 2 minutes remain then STOP. When the time is done, teams should return to their starting position away from the horse/pony and place their equipment on the ground cloth.

3. Showmanship

a. All three members will be judged on their ability to show the horse/pony. Each member will show the horse/pony as instructed by the judge. Team members will compete the showmanship portion in letter order (A,B,C).
b. The showmanship pattern will be determined by the judges.
c. The only equipment change allowed for the showmanship portion of the contest will be a chain lead strap to replace the lead rope used while grooming. No change of halters is allowed.
d. Teams are given 10 minutes to work with their groomed horse/pony to prepare for showmanship.

SCORING

a. Scoring will be as follows:

Written Test	20 points
Equipment	5 points
Safety	25 points
Teamwork & Methods	25 points
Finished Animal Condition	10 points
Showmanship	15 points (5 points per team member)

b. All ties will be broken using the following sequence: 1) written test scores, 2) grooming/safety phase scores, 3) grooming/teamwork & methods scores, and 3) showmanship phase scores.

JUDGES

a. The recommended number of judges for the number of teams participating in the contest is one (1) judge per six (6) teams.
b. Judges should have a copy of all current rules and 4-H booklets prior to the contest.
c. At least two judges from outside of the county should be secured. No one with a team or who has coached a team in the contest may be a judge.

REQUIRED GROOMING KIT

Note: Equipment does not have to be new but should be clean, dry, and in good condition. Items in triplicate should be identical in type and appearance.

(3) Curry combs (hard rubber or plastic)
(3) Stiff bristle brushes
(3) Body brushes (medium stiff bristles)
(3) Dandy brushes or soft bristle brushes
(3) Mane and tail combs OR regular hairbrushes (not both)
(3) Hoof picks (standard type, without a brush)
(3) Grooming cloths (no larger than a hand towel)
(1) Quart of water (can be in a plastic bottle (no glass), spray bottle, or bucket)
(1) Ground cloth (use your good judgment on size)
(1) bottle of fly spray (to be used if needed)
(1) Chain lead

*A chain lead must be displayed on the ground cloth during the grooming portion of the contest. This chain lead may be used, but is not required, during the showmanship portion of the contest. Another chain lead may be used to hold the horse during grooming.

ADDITIONAL ACCOMODATIONS

Requests for accommodations in addition to those stated in this document should be submitted via email to cole.436@osu.edu no later than the registration deadline for the event.

GROOM & CLEAN CONTEST "HELPFUL HINTS"

EQUIPMENT:

1. Placed well behind horses/ponies on ground cloth.
2. Tools do not need to be new, but should not be dirty, or wet.
3. Tools should be placed on the ground cloth with bristles facing up.
4. If hats are worn, they should be removed before grooming and placed with tools.

TEAMWORK:

1. Teams should work smoothly together.
2. Members should not stop grooming until time is called unless there is a question of safety.

SAFETY:

1. 4-H rules of safe handling should be observed.
2. Do not kneel or squat near the horse/pony.
3. Do not crawl under horse/pony.
4. Do not reach across to the other side of the horse/pony.
5. Do not go under the neck.
6. Do not put your head or face where it can be kicked.
7. Do not put tools on ground, under, or on horse/pony. If tool can't fit in pocket, it should be returned to ground cloth.
8. If a tool is dropped, use your foot to move it to a safe distance from the horse/pony before picking it up.
9. Someone should stay near the head.
10. If horse/pony is upset, calm it before continuing.
11. If it becomes obvious that a certain procedure cannot be safely completed, such as handling rear legs, notify the judges.
12. Never get into a position that you can't get out of immediately.
13. Don't all bunch up at one end or one side of the horse/pony.
14. When feet are being cleaned, all should be aware. Unless there is a problem, it is not necessary to stop grooming.

METHOD:

1. Do not rush at horse/pony.
2. Groom from front to back and top to bottom.
3. Use tools in proper order - curry first then body and/or bristle, then dandy brush and rag.
4. Do not tear at the mane and tail.
5. Use one tool at a time - free hand can steady the horse/pony.
6. Curry - do not use on head or below knees and hocks, on sensitive parts, or on mane and tail.
7. Body brush/stiff bristle brush- Do not use on head. May use on lower legs, mane and tail.
8. Dandy brush - May use on entire horse/pony except hooves.
9. Hoof pick - may use edge to scrape mud from outside of hooves. Carefully pick feet in order, starting with near front, then near rear, off rear, and off front. NOTIFY JUDGES WHEN PICKING HOOVES.
10. Water - use on cloth. Do not spray or apply directly on the horse/pony.
11. Fly spray - use with care. If it is absolutely necessary to use while grooming, all grooming should stop. Try to wait to fly spray horse/pony until the ten-minute practice time.
12. Cloth - may use on entire horse/pony. Do not shake cloth near horse/pony.
13. NO TRIMMING ALLOWED - Hair will not be clipped or cut.
14. Halter cleaning will be part of the finished animal condition score.