



Promoting the Essay Contest

The following ideas are suggestions for promoting the essay contest in your county.

1. Have a meeting of the Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom and County FB Women's committee to discuss your county's plan for promoting and handling the contest. Include any other people that could be helpful (i.e. FFA Advisors, 4-H leaders, home school contacts). Does your county offer any incentives or prizes for participants? Discuss how and when you'll judge the entries, follow-up to the schools, and other details.
2. Does your county have a database or list of teachers you work with? If not, contact the schools in your county and find out which schools have 4-5th grade classes. You can get a list of schools from the DPI website's school directory (<http://dpi.wi.gov/directories.html>). You can also get the teachers names that are on the Wisconsin AITC database from Darlene Arneson. All teachers on the Wisconsin AITC Classroom list will receive a new Resource Guide, Essay contest flyer and Teacher's newsletter in the October 2007 mailing. There are about 1500 teachers on that list ranging from grades K-12, home school and private schools.
3. Personal contact is the best! A telephone call to the teacher to arrange a time to present the essay contest information would be best. The teacher may want to meet with you first to discuss the contest- or maybe the teacher will want you to come right in and give a classroom presentation. In schools where there are multiple classrooms of 4-5th grade students, you may be able to have a short meeting with all the teachers to explain the contest and hand out the resource packets. This is a good opportunity to promote your other county AITC resources.
4. Many schools are changing their policies about distributing information. A good committee task is to contact schools you haven't had success with and ask what their rules are for distributing contest information. You may have to clear the essay contest flyer with an administration staff member first and provide enough copies for all students. Sometimes it needs to have the principal or curriculum coordinators approval.
5. If you are asked to give a classroom presentation, use one of the suggested lessons in the Resource packet. There are a variety of different options and all lessons can be changed to fit the classroom you're presenting in. The series of production cards can be used for various contests, timed events, and team events. You could also bring in the actual products to help the students see how they are grown or raised, processed, packaged or marketed. Hands-on activities, display items and providing a snack are always popular with the students! You can also refer to the new lesson plans, Fun Faces of Wisconsin Agriculture, which feature ten commodities grown in Wisconsin. Many of the lessons or activities could be used in your presentations.

6. Follow-up is important. Checking in with the schools during the fall and just before the holiday break will help keep the essay contest fresh in the teacher's minds. You can offer a classroom presentation or other assistance if they need it. Clarifying where the essays can be sent is important. You might even want to provide an envelope with the correct address information for the schools.
7. Consider an incentive for the teachers that have students entering the contest. Perhaps offering them a package of Ag Mags, a choice of one of the Children's Books, the video "Ten Things Kids Want to Know About Farming" or other resource might entice them to have students complete the essays.
8. Use the press releases in your local newspapers for promoting the contest. We are getting more home school families using AITC resources, 4-H clubs (after school programs), and others that see our opportunities. You can modify the press release to fit your local communities and put in your county information.
9. Contact your local agriculture education and FFA advisors. Perhaps their students can help promote the contest through their Food for America activities. The FFA also has an Agriculture Education Proficiency area so your local school may have some students that have an interest in working with elementary classes and could assist you in promoting the contest.
10. Don't get discouraged! Teachers get numerous requests for various contests and activities. Work with the teachers to see how this contest can best fit into their curriculum.

If you need further assistance, please contact Darlene Arneson at 608-828-5719 or darneson.fbcenter@wfbf.com