

The University of Sydney (Darling) Downs the Opposition in the 5th Australian Soil Judging Competition

The University of Sydney's soil judging team has 'brought home the silverware' after the recent running of the 5th Australian Soil Judging Competition, held near Toowoomba, Queensland. In record-breaking late September heat in SE Queensland, the team of five undergraduate soil science students finished a commanding 50 points in front of the second-placed team after the two team-judged soil pits. With strong performances in the individually-judged soil pit as well (Karin Azzam, 2nd placed individual; Ricquelle Miller, equal 3rd placed individual), the team cruised to overall victory to claim the trophy. The USyd team finished first of twelve teams from around Australia and New Zealand, and fifty students from these teams participated in the individual soil judging. Sydney is now the first university to have won the Australian soil judging competition twice, having won the 2nd competition in Melbourne in 2014.



The University of Sydney soil judging team after completing the last competition pit near Oakey, SE Queensland. (back row, l to r) Ricquelle Miller, Stephen Cattle (Coach), Marie-France Courtois, Leon Akopian; (front row, l to r) Karin Azzam, James Deng.

The concept of soil judging revolves around the description of site and soil characteristics, soil classification and the interpretation of soil capability and suitability for different landuses, all for points. It tests the ability of competitors to not just describe the soil features they can observe in a prepared soil pit face, but also to be able to interpret how the soil 'fits into the landscape', how it has been formed, and how well it might support different types of crops. For the 5th Australian Soil Judging Competition, our students had two days of practice describing and interpreting typical soils of the Darling Downs to the west of Toowoomba, and typical soils of the Lockyer Valley to the east of Toowoomba. These two areas are very important agricultural and horticultural regions of Queensland, and in the case of the Darling Downs in particular, are home to some of the blackest, most clayey soils in the country. The competition day soil pits were located on a farm near the town of Oakey in the eastern Darling Downs, and despite the unseasonably hot conditions, the USyd team held their focus and remembered the lessons learned from the previous two days of practice to put in a very strong performance.

Congratulations to all five of our soil judges for a fantastic team effort.



Members of the USyd soil judging team doing their best to lock in some points at the individual soil judging pit.