***By Jan Schultz***
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A 2007 graduate of Chase County Schools is part of the Northeastern Junior College (NJC) livestock judging team that placed fifth nationally in a recent major competition.

Scott Dean was among the eight students from the Sterling, Colo., junior college who earned fifth place in team points at the 35th Junior Collegiate Livestock Judging Contest in Louisville, Ky., last month.

Twenty-five of the top junior college teams in the nation were there, with 114 individual competitors.

Dean, who moved to Chase County with his family in November, 2005, has been involved with livestock for about 12 years since he started in 4-H at the age of eight.

His mom said he agreed to move here from Cortez, Colo., three years ago if they bought a hog farm, even though it was mid-way through his junior year in high school.

His parents, Doug and Kay Dean, purchased the hog farm from Bill Hayes, and moved into the former Sam and Virginia Unzicker home in northwest Chase County.

The road to Louisville for the NJC team didn't come easily. Team members invested about 20 hours per week the last several months perfecting the art of livestock evaluation and the delivery of oral reasons.

Livestock judging is an eloquent explanation of why one animal is better than another, always given in front of one or more critical judges.

It's a sport where there are no time-outs or sideline pep talks in the middle of the game.

In livestock judging competition, team members rate three species of livestock, including lambs, beef and hogs. Afterwards, each individual meets with a judge one-on-one to give "reasons" on why they rated the livestock as they did.

At the recent competition in Kentucky, Dean was the fifth highest individual in the competition on his reasons.

The coach of the NJC team, Ben Cooley, said this team of sophomore members are a competitive group who like to win.

He said most of the students are very passionate about livestock judging, and likewise, about the livestock industry. Many carry the skills gained in this competition into future ag careers.

The livestock judging team's practice and contest schedule is rigorous.

As a matter of fact, Dean and his teammates were spending part of the Christmas break this week practicing in Alliance, as they prepare for the Arizona National in Phoenix that starts New Years Day.

Then, the National Western Stock Show in Denver also comes in January. The NJC team has high hopes of taking a top spot at that close-to-home event.

Additional contests follow early next year in Texas.

As a college sophomore, Dean will complete his studies at NJC after this school year. He will attend Kansas State University next year, with plans to continue his livestock judging involvement.