

Celebration Corner

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4-H Horticulture team finishes first in NJHA contest



The national champion California 4-H Horticulture Team. From left, Michael Rethwisch, Jolene Junge, Maya Krishnaswamy, Noemi Nejedli and Lucas Gribi.

Michael Rethwisch, UC Cooperative Extension farm advisor for Riverside County coached the California 4-H Horticulture team to first place at the 2024 National Junior Horticultural Association (NJHA) contest in Lincoln, Nebraska.

In the contest, the teams had to identify 100 horticultural specimens – 25 from four categories. The categories were flowers and indoor plants; landscape ornamentals; fruits, nuts and berries; and vegetables. They also answered 80

questions on a written test and completed eight sets of judging. Some of the specimens included dahlia and snapdragon seeds, a hawthorn twig, lilac flowers, maple leaves, eggplant seeds, coffee leaves and guava fruit. The California 4-H team scored more than 100 points ahead of the second-place team. A perfect team score would be 1,320 points.

“California was the only team to break 1,000 points this year (including the open class and FFA teams competing in other divisions),” said Rethwisch, who coached the team via Zoom and only met with them in person at the competition.

Four individuals on the California 4-H Horticulture team also earned placings. Maya Krishaswamy of Santa Clara County took first place; Jolene Junge of Tehama County placed second; Noemi Nejedli of Santa Clara County placed fifth; and Lucas Gribi of Alameda County placed 11th.

Rethwisch praised the dedication and personal efforts of the members to learn the specimen details.