

## **\$1M dead zone contest: 5 finalists from AUS, Calif, Ill, NY**

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Teams from Australia, New York and California are among five finalists in Tulane University's \$1 million contest to find ways to fight "dead zones" where water holds too little oxygen to support life. There are hundreds of such areas worldwide, including one that forms each summer off Louisiana's coast.

Two teams from Illinois will join the others in testing their ideas on a farm in northeast Louisiana as phase 2 of the Dead Zone Challenge, also called the Nitrogen Reduction Challenge, the university said in a news release.

The contest is aimed at finding ways to keep fertilizer in the ground, so they don't get into rivers. Scientists say that agricultural nitrogen and phosphorus carried down the Mississippi River are largely to blame for Louisiana's dead zone.

Waterways carry the nutrients to lakes or coastal areas, where they feed blooms of one-celled plants and animals. Those die, fall to the bottom and decompose, using up oxygen from the bottom up.

The university says the finalist teams are from Farmer City and Carmi, Illinois; Ithaca, New York; Berkeley, California; and Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

They were chosen from 77 applicants, including 10 from Australia, Canada, Chile, Brazil, India, Ireland, Israel and Singapore.

"Narrowing down to just five finalists was a very competitive process because of the quantity and the quality of submissions received," challenge director Leah Berger Jensen said.

Their proposals include using electricity to inhibit nitrogen loss, using microbes to get crops to take up more nitrogen, an integrated nutrient management system, and using real-time data and simulation scenarios to decide how much [nitrogen](#) to use in different parts of a field.

They'll be tested on farmland in Tensas Parish and judged on crop yield, runoff and cost.

All five groups will use the same variety of corn from the same vendor. The judging will include the weight of corn harvested and the amount of fertilizer used. That will be measured by weighing the fertilizer brought by each team and the amount remaining at the end of the test.

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