Inspired Students Take Hormones and Algae to a Whole New Level in the Lexus Eco Challenge

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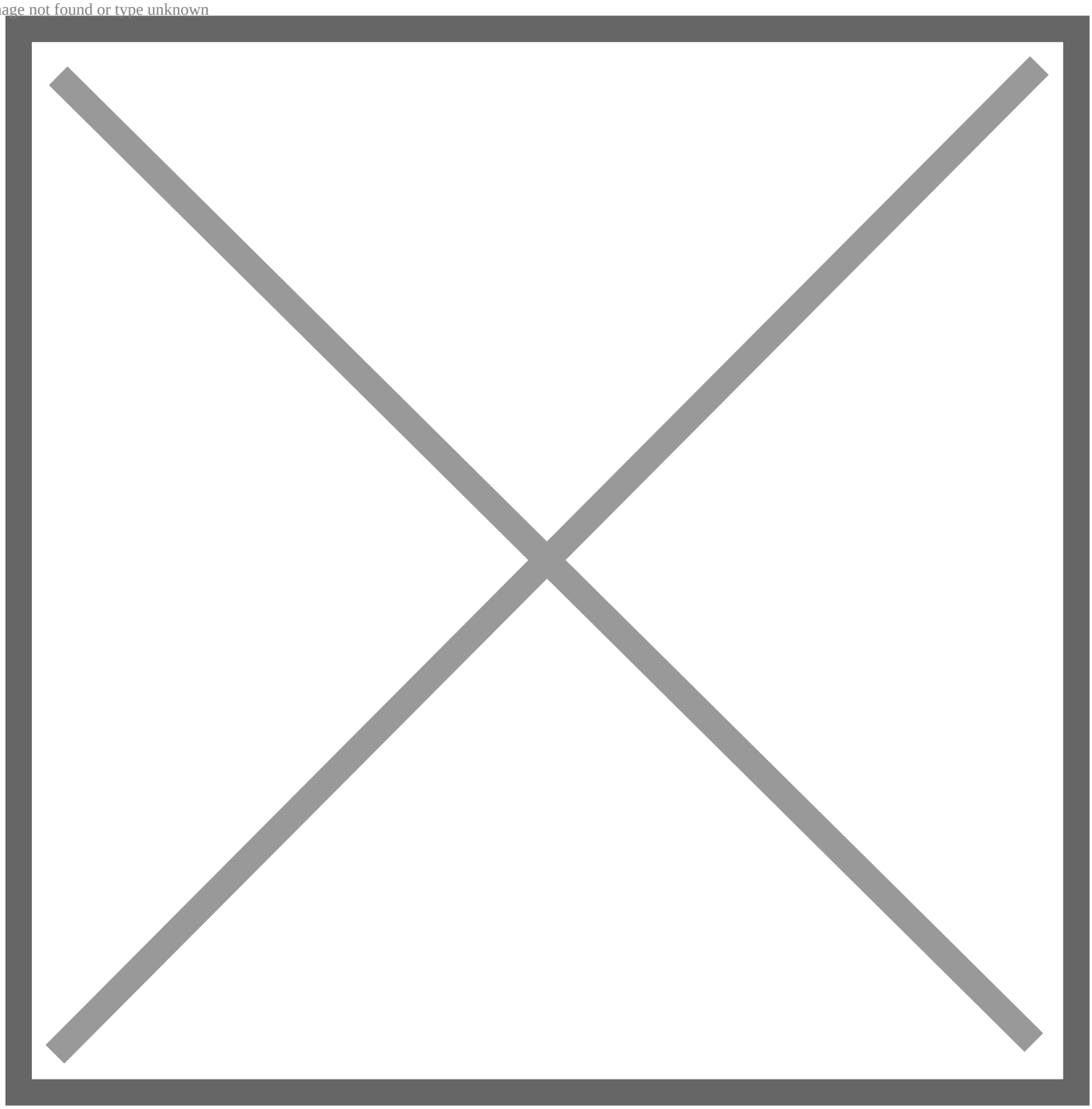

TORRANCE, Calif. – April 13, 2016 – Who knew hormones and slimy green algae would help boost teens' interest in science, technology, engineering and math, and win scholarship money?

Students across the nation are taking charge, learning about their environment, and making a positive impact on the world. Using their knowledge and studies, students, teachers, and schools are being rewarded with $500,000 in scholarships and grants through the Lexus Eco Challenge.

The Lexus Eco Challenge is an educational program and contest that inspires and empowers young people to learn about the environment and take action to improve it. High school and middle school teams nationwide define an environmental issue that is important to them, develop an action plan to address the issue, implement the plan, and report on the results.

Lexus and Scholastic reviewed the finalists' innovative submissions and selected one middle school team and one high school team as the 2015-2016 Lexus Eco Challenge Grand Prize winners.

The Grand Prize-winning teams earn $30,000. Each winning team divides the grand prize: a $7,000 grant for the school, a $3,000 grant for the team's teacher advisor, and $20,000 in scholarships for the students to share. Eight First Place-winning teams will be awarded $15,000 each.

This year's Grand Prize winners are "The Endocrime Fighters" from Arlington High School in LaGrangeville, NY and middle school team "Aquaponics" from Christa McAuliffe School in Jersey City, NJ.

To combat endocrine-disrupting compounds (EDCs)—chemicals that prevent normal functioning of hormones and cause other negative effects—"The Endocrime Fighters" conducted extensive research and experiments. The team found that the disruptors can be found in everyday personal-care products such as sunscreen and lotion. They took action and produced their own homemade lotion and lip balm. In addition, the team lobbied for EDC-free soap for their school district, requesting it be replaced with a safer alternative. The team also educated their community and took political action by forging important relationships and communicating with people at county, state, and national levels to enact change.

"Aquaponics" researched how to prevent algae from reaching a bloom state in their local reservoirs in order to help reduce damage to the ecosystem. Instead of using harmful chemicals, the team explored natural methods and implemented a solution to limit algal bloom. Aquaponics tested various plants in an effort to find the best species to absorb the excess phosphorus and nitrogen that cause algal blooms. The team also designed, built, and installed the Maize Chinampa that was placed in their local reservoir to absorb nutrients. They subsequently took it to the next level in building a second and larger chinampa they called "Algae Attack Chinampa." Aquaponics furthered their community outreach with presentations at six different schools, developing PSA's and conducting interviews with their local television station.

The 2015-2016 Lexus Eco Challenge had more than 1,535 student participants. Thirty-two middle and high school teams were selected as finalists for the Lexus Eco Challenge, each claiming a $10,000 prize to be shared among the team, teacher, and school.

For the final challenge, all 32 finalist teams were tasked with reaching beyond their local community to inspire environmental action. The teams communicated their innovative ideas to a wide audience in the last round, broadening the reach of their work to people outside of their communities.

The Grand Prize- and First Place-winning teams that best addressed environmental challenges are listed below.

Final Challenge

State, City School Name	Team Name	Project Summary
High School Grand Prize Winner		
NY – LaGrangeville Arlington High School	The Endocrime Fighters	Researched endocrine-disrupting compounds and produced an all-natural homemade skin lotion and lip balm.
High School First Prize Winners		
CA – La Crescenta Clark Magnet High School	CCBB Cricket Busters	Educated the community about overfishing and explored the benefits of an alternative source of protein (insects).
OH – Cleveland St. Ignatius High School	Hydrocats	Promoted water conservation through the collection of rainwater by placing rain barrels throughout the school and community.
High School First Prize Winners – con't		
AR – Little Rock Mount St. Mary Academy	The Honeybelles	Raised awareness on the importance of pollinators and need to prevent decline and provided habitat to help with local pollinators.
NY – Jericho Jericho High School	Methane X	Tackled eco impacts of methane gas by spreading the word throughout the community and setting up a compost challenge.
Middle School Grand Prize Winner		
NJ – Jersey City Christa McAuliffe	Aquaponics	Designed contraptions to combat algal blooms and tested plants to help prevent algal blooms in local reservoirs.
Middle School First Prize Winners		
KY – Lexington SCAPA Bluegrass	Mighty Meat Minimizers	Encouraged community to reduce eating two or more meatless meals weekly to decrease carbon emissions.
KY – Lexington SCAPA Bluegrass	No Drive-Thru Crew	Educated and inspired community to park their cars rather than drive through drive-thru restaurants to minimize the CO? released by cars while idling in drive-thrus.

CA – La Habra Washington Middle School	WMS Water Guardians	Created awareness of water conservation by spreading the word via a website and videos distributed worldwide.
Atlanta – GA Kittredge Magnet School	KMS Cougars	Created school and community program recycling plastic water bottles and plastic bags.

To learn more about the winning teams, visit:
http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3750833

Over the past nine years, the Lexus Eco Challenge has awarded more than $5 million in scholarships. More than 30,000 middle and high school students have impacted their communities, learned about the environment, and improved their teamwork skills.

The Lexus Eco Challenge also provides supplemental educational materials, created and distributed by Scholastic, the global children's publishing, education and media company, to encourage teachers to integrate creative environmental lesson plans into their classrooms. For each challenge, the website (www.scholastic.com/lexus) has lesson plans and teacher instructions, including questions to help guide a discussion about the current challenge topic, facts about the topic, and guidelines for a specific classroom project.

The Lexus Eco Challenge is part of The Lexus Pursuit of Potential, a philanthropic initiative that generates up to $3 million in donations each year for organizations that help build, shape and improve children's lives.

Lexus will open the tenth annual 2016-2017 Eco Challenge this fall with $500,000 in prize money for eligible students, teachers, and schools. Information on how students and teachers can participate in the "Land and Water" and/or "Air and Climate" challenges will be available this summer at www.scholastic.com/lexus.