

A Keith County Sheriff's Department investigation into the multi-thousand dollar theft of farming machinery from Keith County in 2008 has apparently been solved, with the arrest of a suspect in Kansas Sept. 11, according to Keith County Sheriff Kevin Mueller.

After an investigation, an arrest warrant was issued for Matthew T. Jones, 30, of rural Colby, Kan., for the alleged crime. Currently, he is being held in the Thomas County Jail in Kansas.

Jones is accused of the April 2008 theft of a John Deere tractor and an experimental John Deere planter near Paxton.

The estimated value of the farming machinery was close to \$500,000 dollars.

"It is a good day when we are able to solve a theft of this magnitude," Mueller said. "We never quit looking for this equipment and had followed up on many leads. There were days we wondered if it would ever be solved, but continued following leads when they came in."

Mueller cited the work of Deputy Jared Small for his work on this case.

The local investigation began following the alleged theft, which took place during the late evening of April 25, 2008 from a field located about six miles southeast of Paxton.

Taken were a John Deere 8530 tractor, pulling an experimental John Deere 1720 prototype planter.

The tractor, owned by Roric Paulman of Sutherland, had an estimated total value of \$275,000. The value of the experimental planter, which was owned by the John Deere Corp., was estimated at \$200,000.

After the implements came up missing the next morning, sheriff's deputies found muddy tracks heading south from the field.

During their investigation, witnesses reported seeing the tractor and planter, accompanied by a dark colored four-door Ford pickup, being driven south.

Despite the efforts of several law enforcement agencies in Nebraska and Kansas at that time, no suspects in the crime were located.

A break in the local investigation came Sept. 11, when the Keith County Sheriff's Department learned that a stolen John Deere tractor from Yuma, Colo., had been located in rural Colby, Kan. Deputies of the Thomas County Sheriff's Department in Kansas had arrested Jones for possession of the stolen tractor.

After a call from the Keith County Sheriff's Department, a search warrant was executed on the Jones property and deputies found the tractor and believe they have found the planter that were taken from Keith County last year.

Based on information from Kansas authorities, the Keith County Sheriff's Department was able to obtain an arrest warrant for Jones for theft-unlawful taking, a Class 3 felony. His bond was set at \$100,000, with the right to post a 10 percent bond.

In addition to the Keith County charge, Jones also is wanted for theft by several other jurisdictions. Agent Delbert Hawel of the Kansas Bureau of Investigations reported that more farming equipment, connected with thefts in Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming, was located on Jones' property.

The recovered equipment included five tractors, two planters, grain drills, crawler tractors, grain hoppers and a flat bed trailer.

The investigation is continuing, with additional search warrants being obtained by the Thomas County Sheriff's Department, the Kansas Bureau of Investigations and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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