

FBI agents Kansas City Division arrested two men March 4 in connection with the April 2008 theft of about \$500,000 worth of farm equipment from a field near Paxton, as well as other equipment stolen from several other states.

Matthew T. Jones, 31, was arrested at Colby, Kan., and Ryan R. Hanzlick, 32, was arrested at Hayes Center.

According to a press release by the FBI, both men were taken into custody without incident.

The investigation and subsequent arrests were part of a joint investigation that included the Thomas County, Kan., Hayes and Keith County Sheriff's departments, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and the FBI in Kansas and Nebraska.

The Keith County Sheriff's Department, specifically Sgt. Jared Small, was part of the joint investigation.

"Their office and Sgt. Small played a major role in this investigation with our office and the others listed," FBI Special Agent Gregg O'Brien said.

Jones and Hanzlick were indicted March 5 in Kansas on 12 counts each for the transport and transfer, in interstate commerce of goods, wares and merchandise, which had a value of \$5,000 or more, knowing to have been stolen, converted and taken by fraud.

If convicted, the crimes carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison on each count.

According to the indictments, the thefts of large farm equipment from Wyoming, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado took place between November 2005 and May 2008.

Small was the initial investigator of the theft of the John Deere 8530 tractor, worth an estimated \$275,000, and a prototype John Deere 1720 planter, valued at an estimated \$200,000, after the equipment was allegedly stolen April 26, 2008 from a farmstead approximately six miles southeast of Paxton.

Deputies followed tire tracks south through Grinton and into Hayes County.

Roric Paulman of Sutherland owned the tractor, and the prototype planter—only one of three made in the U.S.—was owned by John Deere Corp.

According to the Colby Free Press, in September 2009, Jones, of rural Colby, Kan., was arrested by Kansas authorities after they found more than \$1 million in stolen farm equipment on his property that connected to thefts in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming, including the John Deere tractor and prototype John Deere planter that had been taken from southeast of Paxton.

Keith County Sheriff Kevin Mueller said while Keith County had warrants out for Jones, all charges against him were dropped because the FBI would proceed with the case.

“Sgt. Small did an excellent job on this case. He followed up on many leads and shared crucial information with the feds to help the suspects get charged federally,” Mueller said. “I am very pleased with the outcome on this case. With cooperation between state, local agencies and the feds, we were able to break up what appears to be a major theft ring of farm equipment. Knowing that they are facing federal charges with the possibility of receiving lengthy prison sentences is very rewarding for our office.”

Mary Pierce, Keith County News

