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Officers and personnel from the Kansas Highway Patrol, Seward County Sheriff's office, Liberal Police Department, Seward County Emergency Management and a veterinarian work a section of U.S. Highway 54 west of Liberal in a drill Thursday simulating traffic stops to inspect animals suspected of carrying hoof and mouth disease. L&T photo/Victoria Calderon

By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

Agriculture is a way of life in Kansas, and livestock plays a big part in that industry.

In today's modern world, the threat of a disease in livestock is a bigger possibility than it has been in the past, and along with many across the country, emergency personnel in Seward County are taking steps to prevent the spread of any disease from any animal being transported anywhere in the U.S.

County emergency management director Greg Standard discussed part of that plan Monday with county commissioners.

Standard said should an animal be detected somewhere in America with a disease that is considered dangerous to the infrastructure of the livestock industry, the state affected would take action to close its borders.

“We might close as ours as well to prevent anything from that state from getting into our state,” he said.



Standard said the original concept of the plan called for sheriff's deputies to be posted at each of the estimated 130 entry roads to Seward County, but emergency officials later discovered that would not be numerically possible.

“We came up short just a little bit on deputies,” he said jokingly. “Over time, they've realized that wasn't ever practically possible.”

Under the Standard Operating Guide, Seward County will have two places where traffic is stopped, the first of which is at U.S. Highway 54 and County Road G.

Standard said with Seward County's close proximity to Oklahoma, both that state and Kansas are working together, and with that in mind, the other local checkpoint will be at the intersection of U.S. Highway 83 and U.S. Highway 64 in Beaver County, Okla.

Standard said this means Seward County's emergency workers will only have to maintain the U.S.-54 point, and the Kansas Highway Patrol and other agencies will provide assistance with that, including the Kansas Department of Transportation.

"In the plan, we called for three to five sheriff's officers to be involved with this," he said. "It's an attainable plan. It's something that will really function and work to the extent that we can do what we can."

Standard said animals with issues that needed to be held and could not be released to be sent to where they are going or where they came from would either be housed at the Seward County Fairgrounds or at a gravel pit north of Liberal on Hwy. 83.

"Both of those are two sites we own that we can control," he said. "Once they are there, the state is going to tell us what we need to do with those animals to resolve the situation."

The SOG likewise identifies people critical to the plan.

"Obviously, the sheriff and other entities in the county play critical roles in getting this thing done," Standard said. "Those folks are on board. They're aware of the situation and their roles. I feel we're pretty ready to go."

Last Thursday, local law enforcement, county workers, the beef industry, Seward County Emergency Management and a veterinarian ran a movement restrictions drill for diseased cattle at the intersection of Road G and Hwy. 54. Standard said no actual livestock vehicles were stopped in the drill.

"We kind of used some fake ones that we provided," he said.

Standard said the vehicles were stopped for an average of about eight minutes before issues were resolved and the vehicles moved on down the road.

“I felt pretty good about that,” he said. “We think that everybody did a really good job. We’ve got folks that have this thing down and will be able to run with it should the need arise. Hopefully, it won’t come up anytime soon.”

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