

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Daily Leader

Kansas has its share of disasters – tornadoes, ice storms and floods, just to name a few.

“You name it, we probably have it at one time or another,” said Seward County K-State Extension agent Mike Hanson.

Local emergency operations are in place to handle those disasters, controlling everything from damage to houses, trees, businesses and automobiles, but Hanson said one overlooked component of an emergency plan is the most vital part of the state’s economy – agriculture.

Next Thursday and Friday, local and area farmers and ranchers, along with emergency personnel and law enforcement, can learn some preparation in how to handle disasters in the ag industry.

K-State Research and Extension is teaming up with the Extension Disaster Education Network to host two Strengthening Community Agrosecurity Planning workshops, one on Monday and Tuesday in Wichita and one on Thursday and Friday in Liberal.

The workshop is geared for community stakeholders who can assist in the enhancement of the local agricultural emergency operations plan.

Individuals such as local emergency planning personnel, Extension educators, public health personnel, first responders, elected officials veterinarians, ag producers and volunteer

organization representatives are encouraged to participate.

Registration for the workshop will be taken through noon on Wednesday, and Hanson said about 40 people have already registered from 10 counties in three different states.

"We've got room for just less than 20 more people," he said. "We could have up to 60 people including presenters, which there will only be two coming from out of state."

Hanson said the remainder of the presenters will be from Kansas.

"We still would like to see some people in agribusiness and ag production, such as farmers and ranchers, grain elevator operators, feedlot personnel," he said.

To register for the Seward County workshop, call Hanson at 624-5604, or e-mail mhanson2@ksu.edu. There is no fee to participate in the workshops, but for planning purposes, organizers request that attendees register.

Hanson said participating in the workshop will allow first responders and law enforcement workers to get continuing education credits.

"They get certified, and that helps as far as keeping their certification later on," he said.

Hanson said the class is being done in order to better prepare the area for a natural, or man-made, disaster, particularly examining how the event would affect agriculture.

"With agriculture being such a vital part of our economy, what would happen if we did have some kind of an emergency?" he said. "How would it affect us? What physical, mental issues would we have?"

Hanson said the workshop will help Seward and the counties surrounding it to come together and work together better.

"If something does happen, we're going to have to work with Texas County or Beaver County or Haskell and Stevens," he said. "We'll get to become more familiar with what's going on there, also."

Hanson said there will likewise be people from Grant and Finney counties in Kansas, as well as Ochiltree County, Texas, at the event. He said with Seward County sitting on two major highways, U.S.-54 and U.S.-83, and having a major livestock industry were just some of the factors for choosing the county.

"I thought it would be good for us," he said. "We kind of put our name in the hat and sent some forms in to try to get selected for it. They were only going to have one in the state of Kansas, and they named us and Sedgwick County. I think participation here's going to be a lot better than Sedgwick County. We are a crossroads with those two highways. We are ag."

Hanson said some participants in the workshop will be able to learn to train others to assist in an agricultural disaster.

"They are doing a train the trainer," he said. "Some of the people attending this are going to have a little class after the workshop itself on the first night to go through some training. They'll be able to go out and do some training."

The S-CAP workshop begins with registration and refreshments at 8 a.m. Thursday at the Rock Island Depot.