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By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles concerning a meeting Thursday at the Seward County Activity Center. The meeting was in regards to several Farm Bill programs, updates on area crops, the spread of pine wilt in the area and conservation practices. Today's article looks at the state of the area wheat crop and pine wilt in local trees.



Officials from several local, area and state agencies were on hand Thursday afternoon in the Seward County Activity Center to educate producers about some agricultural issues in the region. The meeting was sponsored by USDA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Conservation District and K-State Research and Extension, all of Seward County, along with Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and Pheasants Forever.

K-State Agent Mike Hanson took the floor first and brought producers up to speed on the state of area wheat crops. He said with recent snows and warmer temperatures, crops are starting to bloom, but he said K-State agronomy specialist Jim Shroyer warns farmers to be careful and patient with the current wheat crop.

"The potential is out there on a lot of this wheat, especially in the Liberal area, to make some bushels," Hanson said. "It's not going to be a great crop, but with the price of wheat right now, it's something you want to be patient with. There is a concern with it coming out of dormancy lately."

Hanson said problems exist with the hardiness of some of the wheat crop as well as recent cold snaps. He did say, however, the best wheat in Seward County is currently in the area closest to Liberal, but other crops in the area have not fared as well.

"You get up around 160 as you go toward Plains, there's some issues where the later planted wheat didn't get up, but there is still the potential once we start getting moisture on that to maybe make a 30 to 70 percent of a normal crop if we could get timely moisture and stay cool on that," he said. "At \$8.50 dollar wheat, you might want to be patient on it. We do see a lot of wind damage on some of the thin wheat. That's something we're going to keep an eye on."

Hanson next visited a concern that has become a bigger problem than usual recently in Seward County – pine wilt disease. He said the disease is especially prevalent in local Austrian pines.

"That's where we're seeing it mostly in Seward County," he said. "It's a deadly disease. Once a tree gets it, you can't get rid of it."

Hanson likewise said there are no effective measures that can be taken to prevent the disease.

“The one they do have out there cost \$100, \$150 per tree to treat with about a 60 to 70 percent success rate on it,” he said. “If you’ve got 100 trees out there, you’ve got to treat every other year with a 60 to 70 percent success rate. It’s not real efficient moneywise.”

Hanson said it is unknown how pine wilt made its way to Southwest Kansas, and it has spread rapidly westward in the past year. He explained how the disease gets into a tree.

“A pine sawyer beetle brings it in,” he said. “It’s got nematodes under its wings and its throat. When those sawyer beetles are eating on the pine tree, those nematodes are basically injected into the tree, and it cuts off the resin flow.”

Hanson said many times, trees die within two to three weeks of acquiring pine wilt.

“There was a 60-year-old Austrian pine here in town which was the first one we found. It looked great the first part of August, and they cut it down at the end of October,” he said.

Hanson said anyone suspecting they may have pine wilt should call the Extension office in Liberal. That number is 624-5604.

“Myself or one of our master gardeners will get out there and take a sample, get it sent in,” he said. “Those trees, if they do have it, we need to get them out by April 1 or earlier because the sawyer beetles will start coming out of dormancy and causing problems there. (The trees) need to be burnt or chipped.”

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