
Serial Arson

County sheriffs and deputies work hard to protect rural communities across the state, but sometimes need a little help.

Investigative Services specializes in investigations dealing with agricultural crimes including livestock theft, equipment theft, timber theft and wildland fire arson.

The Tillman County Sheriff's office contacted Investigative Services requesting assistance investigating a series of wildland fires in March 2008. Mike Grimes, Director of Investigative Services, assigned agents Patrick Blake and Michael Hooper to investigate.

"Most sheriffs are grateful for our help," Grimes said. "We specialize in those areas. They focus on everything from homicides to trash dumping."

State investigative agents have an advantage over county sheriffs according to Grimes. "We are not bound by county lines," he said.

Agents Blake and Terry Gregg attended a federal law enforcement course for serial arson in Colorado last year. The agents advanced their training in wildland fire investigation case development including determining the origin of fires, identifying and studying the vicinity where the fires took place, and looking into possible causes. Wildland fires can be particularly difficult as evidence is sometimes destroyed by the fire or in the process of extinguishing the fire. Once fires are determined to be set by arson, case work on each fire helps determine if they are linked, and therefore serial, and how many suspects are involved.

"That course taught me how to recognize and link together individual fires to show that one person was responsible for all of them," Blake said.



Investigator Patrick Blake

Investigators Blake and Hooper worked for eight months on the Tillman County fires before filing third-degree arson charges against a suspect in November for fires set since February 2008. The suspect was taken into custody and admitted to setting six fires; although Investigative Services believes he was involved in 27 fires. The case is due in court in March.

Blake believes the federal arson training helped bring the Tillman County investigation to a close.

"If you ever get to a point where you aren't learning, you get stagnant," Blake said. "You need to always try to learn."

Grimes' continued desire to stay abreast of new techniques is important to all types of cases handled by Investigative Services. Agents are required to complete 24 hours of advance training each year, plus two hours of mental health training. "Normally we exceed that requirement," Grimes said. Agents train in many areas to better investigate all agricultural crimes. Recently investigators attended a week-long interview and interrogation techniques session.

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GIS Mapping

Maps with layers of information are valuable tools for the Department's investigators, inspectors and firefighters. David Wheelock, GIS Specialist in the Information Technology Section of the Administration Division, customizes maps to meet the needs of users.

GIS, or Geographic Information System, maps are generated from volumes of underlying data. "It's drawing pictures with science," explains Wheelock.

Layers of individual maps showing the locations of streets, creeks, poultry houses, fire towers and dozens of other items are stored in the computer. The layers are combined to give as much information as needed. Wheelock also creates three dimensional maps that can rotate in all directions.

This map wizard sees a way to use GIS mapping in all aspects of ODAFF's duties. He has already mapped wildland fires, legislative districts, vineyards, feral swine, groundwater wells and fire ants.

"I'm customer driven," said Wheelock. Upcoming projects include revisions to the sensitive crop viewer and maps with exact locations of agritourism venues.

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GIS WORK—GIS Specialist David Wheelock shows features of GIS maps.

Farmers and Ranchers Surveyed

Farmers and ranchers will soon have the opportunity to update production input costs and asset resource data to reflect the issues that affect them – and to help ensure that policies and programs are based on accurate, real-time data. This is the goal of the annual Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS), conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) – the parent agency of our very own Agricultural Statistics Division.

The ARMS is the primary source of information on production practices, resource use and economic well-being of Oklahoma's agriculture operations and households.

"Just about every federal policy and program that affects farmers and farm families is based on information from ARMS," said Wilbert Hundl, Jr., Director of the Agricultural Statistics Division. "This information is used not just by USDA, state and federal gov-

ernment, but also by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, Oklahoma State University research and extension, Oklahoma commodity groups, producer organizations, agribusinesses and others who make decisions that shape the future of Oklahoma agriculture."



RESOURCE SURVEY — Farmers and ranchers will be contacted in the annual ARMS survey to identify business issues in cow/calf operations and other farming and ranching practices.

Between December 2008 and March 2009, NASDA enumerators will contact Oklahoma farmers and ranchers by mail, phone or personal visit to complete the survey. Producers will be asked to provide data on their operating expenditures, production costs and household characteristics.

"All farm operators rely on quality information and sound government policies in order to run a successful business. That's why participation in ARMS is so important," Hundl explained.

"Producer participation in ARMS ensures that decisions affecting farmers, their families, their businesses and their communities are based on the facts, straight from the source."

"This year's survey is particularly important to Oklahoma producers because of the cow/calf version. We need updated data to reflect current-day production aspects," said Hundl.

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Cattle Theft 1-405-522-6102

Agricultural Environmental Management Services 1-800-235-9877

Poultry Litter 1-800-583-7131

Arson 1-800-522-8666

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 2009

- 6** Oklahoma Pork Council, Express Event Center, OKC
- 9-10** Oklahoma No-Till Conference Sheraton Hotel, OKC
- 13** American Farmers & Ranchers Annual Convention, OKC
- 16-17** Oklahoma Farm Bureau Leadership Conference, OKC