

Rural Crime Prevention

Livestock Theft

The excellent prices received for livestock make the theft of animals a lucrative business. Some producers have lost truckloads of animals, and others are bothered with losses of one or two animals at a time for several months.

Research indicates the livestock theft is the most significant rural crime. Not only do producers incur significant financial loss, there is also the loss of future breeding herds and bloodlines. Of particular concern is the increased risk of stolen livestock with fraudulent health status paperwork entering the processing and marketing chain. This poses an unacceptable risk to the United State's domestic and international trade.

What you can do

There are things you can do to deter thieves.

- Regularly check your livestock, fields, and fences where the animals are grazing – daily if possible – especially around sale days to ensure suspected losses are recognized and reported to the police as soon as possible.
- Keep all fields, shed, and stockyard gates closed and locked. Use locking posts to obstruct large openings in yards.
- Keep your fences and gates in good repair. Gate hinges should have a cap put on them so that they cannot be easily lifted off the hinges.
- Ditches form a natural barrier.
- Go around your property and look at it through the eyes of a thief. Look for areas where thieves could easily operate. Pay close attention to fields bordering public roads.
- Be visible on your property. Leave tire tracks and evidence that you are frequently checking your fields.
- Have a farm plan, indicating when and where things happen, and where equipment and livestock is located.
- Be aware of strangers or unfamiliar vehicles in your area. Write down their license plate number and all other relevant information and pass it on to your local police. Also notify your neighbors.
- If you have two or more incidents where someone has accesses your property, notify your neighbors and ask them to be on the lookout for the same thing happening to them.
- Talk with your trusted neighbors, tell them when you are away from your property and where you can be reached.
- Locate livestock pens or loading ramps away from public roads or main entrances to your property. Keep them locked when not in use. Ensure loading ramps are stored out of sight when not in use.
- Don't leave livestock in holding pens adjacent to stockyards if the yards are not in sight of the farmhouse.
- If you have been a victim of a livestock theft, you may want to consider an alarm linked to your electric fence that activates an alarm in your house if the fence has been cut or broken.



LIVESTOCK THEFT

Reporting a theft

If livestock are stolen, it is important that you report the crime to your local law enforcement and WSDA Livestock Inspector as soon as possible. Many farmers fail to report thefts because they may be unsure of exactly how many animals are missing. Some believe it is a waste of time because a theft would be impossible to prove, or the amount of time between the crime's discovery and when it happened.



However, these agencies would like to hear about the theft, even if some time has passed and regardless of the number of stock missing. There may be a pattern of crime in the county and with more information, they can begin an investigation.

If you are the victim of a theft, the sooner it's reported the better. Do not disturb anything in and around the area involved until the officers arrive. Do not allow people or animals in and around the area or in areas where entry was possibly made. You will need to provide the officers with an accurate description of your animals including:

- The breed, age, and sex of your animals,
- The type of identification used and the numbers,
- Where the livestock was located,
- When you last checked on them,
- Any other relevant information.



Enforcement agencies emphasize the importance of livestock identification and accurate farm records for tracing stolen livestock. Officers are provided training in rural areas to better equip them for investigating these types of crimes. It is in your best interest to ensure the officer understands all the information you provide. ***They know crimes – you know livestock!*** Also let them know if you find the missing livestock.

Identifying your livestock is absolutely essential for the return of the stolen livestock, and the eventual conviction of the offenders. There can be several witnesses to a livestock theft, but without positive identification, the thief will never be prosecuted. Identifying your livestock can be accomplished by using ear tags, earmarks, tattooing, branding, etc. It is best to use a combination of these. Freeze, hot iron branding are the most visible identification systems.

- Branding is the only legal method in Washington to prove ownership of an animal in a court of law. Brands are registered with the Washington State Department of Agriculture. If you do not have a brand, you may obtain a brand application form either online or by mail. **It is unlawful to place a brand on livestock if the design is not registered in this state.** For Questions – call (360)902-1855.

Unbranded livestock is at risk – they can be stolen and branded by someone else and you will not be able to prove ownership!

- Take photographs of your livestock with the brand of valuable animals with the brand and/or ear tag clearly visible with some aspect of your farm showing in the picture.

If you are reporting a crime in progress, dial 911. Stay on the line and follow the instructions from the 911 operator.

**For More Information:
Contact your local Sheriffs Department
or,
Washington State Department of Agriculture
(360) 902 - 1800**



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