Rural Crime Prevention

General Farm Security

Property crime on U.S. farms is increasing, with serious financial and personal losses for farmers. Isolation, ease of access and the portable nature of livestock and equipment make farms an inviting target for thieves, vandals and other criminals. Primary responsibility for crime prevention on farms rests with property owners and this brochure suggests ways you can reduce the risks on your property. Some suggestions may not suit your situation. Use your own judgment to work out what you need to do to avoid the loss, inconvenience and anxiety associated with crime on farms.

1. The property boundary: The boundary is the property owner's primary line of defense. The stronger and more noticeable it is, the greater the probability of deterring a thief.

- Secure locks and gates. Gates should be as strong as possible, mounted securely and locked with heavy-duty chains and padlocks.
- Keep your fences and gates in good repair.
- Ditches form a natural barrier. Use locking posts or large rocks to obstruct large openings to yards etc.
- Go around your property and look at it through the eyes of a thief.
- 'No Trespass' signs clearly define boundaries, and warning signs about watch dogs, alarms on the premises and identification marks on all equipment will deter some thieves.

2. Outlying fields: Outlying areas are more difficult to secure. There are some things you can do to protect property in remote parts of your farm.

Machinery or equipment left in fields:

- Park machinery where it can be seen from a neighbor's house, or out of sight behind a hill or tree line.
- Remove the keys and if possible, disable machinery by removing the distributor cap, rotor or battery.
- Secure equipment with heavy chains and good quality locks.
- Put lockable caps on fuel outlets to prevent theft.
- Always lock vehicles. Don't leave valuable items or tools in vehicle trays. If a toolbox is attached, secure it with a good quality padlock.
- Mark equipment, vehicles and machinery in at least two places with an identification number or other mark. Removable parts should also be marked.
- Keep fuel tanks, pumps and electric fence units secured and locked. If the fuel supply is electronically operated, consider isolating the power supply.

Livestock:

- Ensure all animals are marked for identification. Photograph or video valuable animals.
- Maintain complete livestock records with identification numbers. List the livestock you buy or sell and record births and deaths.
- Use strong chains and locks on all gates, access routes and loading ramps.
- Don't locate livestock yards or loading ramps near main roads or access points.
- Regularly check your livestock and the fields and fences where livestock are grazing - daily if possible
- Avoid making checks at a regular time.

Grain silos: Silos should be located within sight of the farm house or a neighbor's house.

- To increase visibility, storage areas should be well lit.
- The storage area should have only one entrance with a secure gate, heavy chains and locks. Protect any other approaches with ditches, fences or removable locking posts.
- Render augers or other loading equipment inoperable when not in use.

3. Central work area: Visibility is a key factor day and night to safeguard your property.

- **Thieves hate bright lights.** Light the house and yard area with security lights operating on time switches or sensors.
- Large machinery and equipment should be grouped and secured in a visible area. Prime targets such as fuel tanks should be easily seen from the house.
- Store machinery, tools and equipment, chemicals and fertilizer in sheds.
- Trees can be a good screen for thieves. Keep windbreaks to just one side of your yard.

4. General Security

- A good watch dog in the house and yard area is one of the best security measures.

WSDA thanks the Office of Crime Prevention, The Government of Western Australia for much of the information in this brochure.

GENERAL FARM SECURITY

- Be seen around your property; make it clear you frequently check your property.
- Don't have set times when you leave your property, e.g. to go to town.
- Have a plan of your property, showing location of livestock and equipment.
- Consider security when designing and erecting new buildings, sheds or livestock pens. Ideally, build them in sight of a farm house.
- Construct sheds from strong materials with heavy duty rollers or metal gates at entrances. Use good quality chains and padlocks to lock doors or gates.
- Tell trusted neighbors when you are going to be away from your property. Suggest they do the same.
- Use metal engravers or stamps to mark all tools, vehicles, machinery and equipment. Put it in at least two places, one easily visible and another hidden.
- Paint an iridescent colored spot on all tools, equipment and machinery. If stolen goods are found in the same district, police can quickly identify them. You will still need your license number in a hidden location to link it to you.
- A complete list of property and livestock should be maintained with descriptions of the color, serial numbers, unique markings, ID numbers etc.
- Store chemicals and fertilizers in a separate locked storage area. Keep an inventory of chemicals with the full product name, description of container, formulation type, batch number, manufacturer's name and expiry dates. Keep invoices and receipts. Stored chemicals, fertilizer and fuel should be kept to a minimum to reduce potential loss. Post warning signs on or near storage facilities containing farm chemicals.

Staff:

- Use word of mouth when employing staff or check their references.
- Before they start, talk about your crime prevention measures.
- Keep a good record of past staff especially if there has been a dispute or firing.
- Take staff photos. Keep descriptions of employees, specific marks etc.
- Neighbors working together, being each other's eyes and ears, and being willing to call the Police, can reduce crime.
- Note down descriptions of strangers or strange vehicles including license numbers, location, date and time. This will be invaluable to Police if a crime occurs in the area.

Watch out for good deals:

- People with deals too good to refuse should be regarded with suspicion.
- Either reject the offer or tentatively accept it, but contact Police immediately.
- Dry up the local market for stolen items by buying only from legitimate dealers or individuals.
- Farm clearing sales can be a point of sale for stolen goods. Be suspicious of outside vendors wanting to sell goods at a local sale and let Police know.

If a Crime Occurs: What you do after a crime can make a big difference to the success of the Police investigation.

Upon discovery:

- Immediately notify the Police. No theft is too small to report. It may offer the clue leading to an arrest or the breaking of an agricultural crime ring.
- Accurately answer Police questions and follow their instructions.
- Do not disturb the area or point of entry before Police arrive.

When the officers arrive:

- • Cooperate fully by following Police instructions.
- • Provide all information possible (including where purchased) about items or livestock taken and about any suspicious people or vehicles.
- • If you recall additional information after the officers have gone, contact them immediately.
- • Ask Police what could have been done to avert the crime and implement measures to prevent it happening again.

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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