

Rural Crime Prevention

Identification of Farm Machinery, Tools and Equipment

Crime is no longer just an urban problem. There is an alarming increase in the theft of tools and equipment from farms and ranches. Items stolen include chain saws, grinders, automotive tools, air compressors, saddles, bridles, and harnesses from farm sheds; fencing materials, irrigation pipes and sprinkler heads from fields; and batteries and radios tractors, combines, or other farm vehicles. Items that are light and easy to carry and can be sold quickly are targeted. Many thefts go unreported.

Farmers pay for the loss of farm equipment due to theft through the high cost of replacing equipment and through lost work time.

What you can do

Farmers can discourage and minimize the theft of property from their farms by providing a way for the police to identify stolen property. Proof of ownership is essential in any court of law to secure a conviction.

- Use metal engravers or stamp sets to mark tools, vehicles, machinery, and equipment with a permanent identification number.
- Make a habit of this each time you purchase new equipment. Encourage local suppliers to offer free engraving with a sale in place of the usual calendar or item with their logo on it.
- Maintain an inventory in a safe place of all plant, tools, and equipment, especially those of considerable value. Record the serial numbers for each piece of equipment and include a description of the type, make, and brand of each piece and other distinguishable markings as well as the replacement value. Keep a record of the location of the identification marks on each piece. For farm machinery, record the chassis and model numbers.
- It is a good idea to take a photograph of each piece of equipment for easy identification. It is particularly important to take photographs or videos of valuable or unusual equipment. Try to have some identifiable aspect of your farm in the background.
- Always keep tools and small pieces of machinery locked away. Don't leave them lying around.
- Store tools on a shadow-board. Simply trace around the tool on a board or piece of plywood where you can hang all your small tools. That way if something is missing, you can easily identify what it is.
- Report all thefts to the police. They need to know where theft is occurring in the county so they can target their crime offensives.
- All stolen goods need a ready market. Let the police know about suspicious activities in your county. They are eager to receive information that will enable them to start an investigation to stop thieves.
- Be suspicious of outside vendors who may wish to sell goods at a local swap meet or flea markets. Report all suspicious activities to the police.



IDENTIFICATION

Where should farm equipment be marked?

To make it easy for the police to quickly identify your equipment if it is stolen, place a primary marking in uniform location. Then make a secondary marking in some out-of-the-way place known only to you. Then if your primary identification mark is removed or destroyed, you can still claim your property because your secondary marking will provide a positive means of identification.

Some useful tips for marking your equipment

- Pitted or painted surfaces should be sanded to ensure a clear-cut imprint.
- Try an imprint on a piece of metal to get accustomed to the surface.
- If you make a mistake or the number is blurred, **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO SAND OR GRIND IT OUT.** Simply imprint directly under the blurred imprint.
- Ideally use a welder to mark large items or farm equipment so that the mark can be recognized even if offenders attempt to grind it off.
- A useful identification method is to mark equipment with your driver's license number followed by the letters 'WA' for your state or use your stock brand. Thieves may overlook such a mark.
- Paint a spot, for example in an iridescent color, on all tools, equipment, and machinery. If the tools are stolen and subsequently found in the same county, police can quickly identify them. There is a need to link the paint spot with the owner. Make sure to record the color on your inventory.
- Paint your name on valuable tarpaulins in letters at least one foot high.



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What if I sell or trade my equipment?

Some equipment may change hands at times. It is suggested that you notify the new owner that you have marked your equipment with an identification number and suggest that the new owner put his/her mark below yours. In this way the equipment can be traced from one owner to another.

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



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