

Crime on Farms

The common perception of life in rural Australia is that it is virtually crime free. However, crime in rural communities is on the increase and in some areas, is seriously affecting the quality of life for residents.

This brochure introduces the Institute for Rural Future's series on Crime Prevention on Farms. Topics in the series address specific measures that enable landholders to reduce their vulnerability to crime. These measures have been developed from the ideas and tried and true initiatives given to us by farmers across New South Wales. We sincerely thank them for their valuable contribution.



Why crime has increased

Two things necessary for a crime to occur include a suitable or attractive target, and an opportunity to carry out a crime without being detected. One way to understand the rise in crime on farms is to examine the increasing influence of these two factors.

Suitable targets

Farmhouses have just as many televisions, stereo systems, video machines and other items that are attractive to thieves, as do urban homes. The increasing size of many Australian farms means that operations are now highly mechanised and capital intensive. Properties have more machinery, tools and equipment, pesticides, herbicides and valuable produce that are of interest to thieves. With livestock currently bringing excellent prices, there has been an increase in the incidence of stock theft.

Opportunity

The isolation of many rural areas, the ease of access to most properties and the portable nature of livestock and equipment means farms are an inviting opportunity for thieves, vandals and other criminals. Remoteness and distance between properties increases the chance of theft because there is little chance that neighbours will observe the thieves.

A second factor related to increased opportunity is the improvement in transportation systems. Highways have improved, and a large proportion of country roads are now sealed. Therefore, most rural areas are easily accessible. The improvement in the speed and power of modern vehicles also increases the accessibility and opportunity for crime. For example, with modern transports, livestock can be stolen, transported and disposed of even before the theft is discovered.

Improved transportation also means that country people have increased their time away from their properties, shopping in major urban centres or participating in off-farm employment. As a result, rural homes are vacant more often and for longer periods of time and are therefore, more vulnerable.

There have been an increasing number of city people who purchase weekend country retreats on small acreages near large urban centres. There are also many city dwellers who move permanently to rural communities to take advantage of cheaper housing and cost of living. In many areas, there are increasing numbers of transient workers seeking seasonal farm work. These social changes have meant that local residents are no longer assured that they know everyone in their community. This has lessened the security of once close-knit communities. In addition, while crime is increasing in rural areas, the number of police in rural areas has not.

A final factor influencing increased opportunity for crime is that for many years, country people have enjoyed the freedom of living in areas that were relatively free of crime. This has encouraged people to lead a more trusting and casual way of life, which means that many rarely lock up or secure their properties and therefore, are easy targets for thieves. Country people can no longer afford to be as casual about security but this does not mean they have to accept crime or become victims. There are many things they can do.

Crime prevention on farms

The basic philosophy of all crime prevention programs is to decrease opportunity. Country people can take positive and effective steps toward reducing crime by taking responsibility to secure their own property and by being alert to suspicious activity in the neighbourhood. There are no guarantees in life and that includes the prevention of crime. But every action to prevent crime contributes to greater security.

Use judgement

Crime prevention on farms requires judgement. Not every crime prevention practice is needed on every farm. Your judgement is best. You need to work out how much and what type of security measures are necessary to avoid the loss, the inconvenience and anxiety associated with crime on farms.

The Institute for Rural Futures has developed a series of publications on Crime Prevention on Farms. Each publication describes a specific aspect of reducing opportunity for crime. The topics include:

- Livestock theft.
- Fuel tank security.
- Farm machinery theft.
- Identification of tools and equipment.
- Farmhouse security.
- Seed and grain theft.
- Rural Watch.
- Reporting a crime to Police.
- Illegal trespassers and shooters.
- Farm security generally.

For more information, or if you wish to comment on the material in this leaflet, or if you have any other suggestions for crime prevention strategies on farm, please contact Elaine Barclay at:

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