General Farm Security

In the past, crime was mostly a city problem, but in recent years, the problem of property crime on Australian farms has been increasing, and often involves serious financial and personal losses for farmers. 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 target for thieves, vandals and other criminals. Farmers pay for the loss of thefts through the cost of replacing equipment and through lost work time.

Crime Prevention On Farms

While there are some Neighbourhood Watch and Rural Watch groups operating in various parts of the country, initial responsibility for crime prevention on farms rests with individual property owners. While the suggestions in this brochure are not a guarantee against crime, if followed, they will reduce the chances for crimes occurring. Not every crime prevention practice is needed on every farm. Several of these suggestions may seem a bit drastic and time consuming, but they are worthwhile if crime is a concern in your area. 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 physical layout of a farm presents problems in developing or executing security practices. To describe effective security on farm, we have divided a property into three areas; the boundary, the outlying paddock areas, and the central work and storage area.

1. The property boundary

   The boundary is the property owner’s primary line of defence. The stronger and more noticeable it is, the greater the probability of deterring a thief.

   - Secure locks and gates. A gate is only secure if it is closed and locked. Gates at entrances to your property and high risk areas, should be as strong as possible, mounted securely to strong corner posts, and locked with heavy-duty chains and padlocks.

   - Keep your fences and gates in good repair.

   - Ditches form a natural barrier. Use locking posts to obstruct large openings to yards etc. Cattle grids should be
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removable and locked out of position when not in use.

- Go around your property and look at it through the eyes of a thief. Look for areas where thieves could easily operate. This particularly applies to paddocks that border a public road.

- Put up Neighbourhood Watch or Rural Watch signs along the perimeter and especially in areas likely to be used as entrance to the property. ‘No Trespass’ signs conspicuously placed can clearly define boundary lines and alert thieves that you are watchful on your property. Put up warning signs letting potential thieves and trespassers know that there are watch dogs, alarms on the premises and the property has identification marks.

2. Outlying paddocks
Outlying paddocks and remote sheds, not readily visible from the main farm house and yard area, are more difficult to secure. There are some things you can do to protect property that must be left out temporarily, or is located in remote parts of your farm.

Machinery or equipment in paddocks:
At times it is necessary to leave machinery overnight in paddocks.

- If possible, position machinery where it can be seen from a neighbour’s or employee’s house, or park it out-of-sight behind a hill or tree line.

- Remove the keys from powered equipment and if possible and practical, disable the equipment by removing the distributor cap, rotor or battery.

- You can secure equipment with heavy chains and good quality locks. Either chain and lock pieces of equipment together; or to trees or other stationary objects; or chain the rear to the front wheel or axle.

- Put lockable caps on fuel outlets to prevent theft.

- Always lock vehicles. Don’t leave valuable items displayed inside and don’t leave tools or other items scattered in vehicle trays. If a tool box is attached, secure the contents with a good quality padlock.

- All equipment, vehicles and machinery should be marked in at least two places with an identification number or mark. Easily removable parts on equipment should also be marked.

- Keep external fuel tanks, pumps and electric fence units secured and locked at their point of use. If the fuel supply is electronically operated, consider isolating the power supply.

Livestock:

- Ensure all animals are marked for identification. Maintain records of identification with a description of animals and photographs or video of valuable stock.

- Maintain stock records. Keep accurate records of all livestock bought and sold from your property. Record all births and deaths of livestock on your property. Record all details of identification numbers.

- Use strong chains and locks on all gates, across access routes and on loading ramps.

- Don’t locate stock yards and or loading ramps near main roads or access points unless security measures are implemented.

- Regularly check your stock and the paddocks and fences where the stock are grazing - daily if possible - especially around sale days. But avoid establishing a routine time when checks are made.

Grain silos:
Silos should be located for visibility, i.e. within sight of the farmhouse or an employee’s or neighbour’s house.

- To increase visibility, storage areas should be well lit.

- The storage area should have only one entrance requiring a secure gate, heavy
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chains and locks. All other approaches should be protected by ditches and fences or removable locking posts.

- Render augers or other loading equipment inoperative 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.
- All machinery and equipment should be grouped and secured in a visible area. Prime targets, such as fuel tanks should not be located behind sheds or silos.
- Reduce machinery, tools and equipment, chemical and fertiliser visibility by storing it in sheds when not in use.
- Trees planted as windbreaks surrounding your whole house yard area make a good screen for thieves. Confine windbreaks to just one side of your yard.

**General Security**

- A good watch dog or two confined to a house and yard area, is one of the best security measures.
- Don’t have set times when you leave your property, such as a regular day to town.
- Be seen around your property; leave tyre tracks and evidence that you regularly check your property.
- Have a plan of your property, indicating when and where things happen, and where stock and equipment are located.
- Consider security when designing and erecting new buildings, sheds or stockyards. (Build them in sight of a farmhouse.)
- 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.
- If you have two or more accesses to your property, ask neighbours to watch for strange vehicles.
- Liaise with your trusted neighbours; tell them when you are away from your property and where you can be contacted. Suggest they do the same.
- Use metal engravers or stamps to mark all tools, vehicles, machinery and equipment with a permanent identification number. Place an identification number in at least two places, one easily visible and another in a hidden location. A useful identification is to mark equipment with your driver's licence number followed by the letters 'NSW' for your State, your Rural Lands Protection Board number or use your property's stock brand. Thieves may overlook such a mark.
- Paint a spot for example, in an iridescent green colour, on all tools, equipment and machinery. If the tools are stolen and subsequently found in the same district, police can quickly identify them. There is a need to link the paint spot with the owner. Therefore, it is necessary to have a second mark as well as the paint spot, such as a second identification number in a hidden location.
- A complete list of all permanent property and stock should be maintained with descriptions of the colour, serial numbers, unique markings, ID numbers etc.
- Photographs or videos make excellent supporting documents, and can useful to describe an item or animal.
- Store chemicals and fertilisers in a separate locked storage area. Maintain an inventory of chemicals that includes the full product name, description of the container, formulation type, batch number, manufacturers name, expiry dates and keep invoices and receipts. To reduce potential loss, stored chemicals, fertilizer and fuel should be kept to a minimum. 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 is a dispute or sacking.
- Take staff photos. Keep descriptions of employees, specific marks etc.

**Be alert to strangers:**
- Neighbours working together, being each other’s extra eyes and ears, and not being afraid to “get involved” by contacting the Police, can reduce the crime rate in your district.
- Strangers and or strange vehicles should be noted when observed in an area. Write down a description of the vehicle and/or persons, licence number, the location, date, and time observed. This information 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 outright reject the offer or tentatively accept the deal, but contact the police immediately with particulars, and a description of the individuals and vehicles involved.
- 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 who may wish to sell goods at a local sale. Report all suspicious activities to Police.

**Should A Crime Occur**
If you are unfortunate to be a victim of crime, your actions following the discovery of a crime can impact upon the success of the subsequent investigation by Police.

**Upon discovery:**
- Immediately notify the Police. Do not consider any theft to small to report. It may offer the clue leading to the arrest of an agricultural crime ring.
- Accurately answer any questions asked and listen to instructions given.
- Do not disturb anything in or around the area involved until the police arrive.
- Do not allow people or animals in or around the area or in areas where entry was possibly made.

**When the officers arrive:**
- Cooperate fully by following their instructions.
- Provide all information possible about items or stock taken etc.
- Try to recall where the items or stock were purchased and provide descriptive information and any other information that might be of use to officers in regard to suspicious people and vehicles.
- If you recall additional information after the officers have gone, contact the station immediately.
- Review with officers what could have been done to avert a crime. Implement measures to prevent it happening again.

**Acknowledgment:**
These crime prevention strategies 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 valued contribution. Additional material has been drawn from the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Association.
URL: [http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/](http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/)

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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