

Reporting Crimes to Police

One of the biggest obstacles police face in dealing with crime on farms is the lack of reporting of crimes by farmers. If the police do not hear about a crime, there is little they can do. If people do not report crimes, the offenders will get away with whatever they have done and will be encouraged to do it again. It is true that police are busy, but they are never too busy to deal with a crime no matter how trivial you think it is. Often police will find that incidences of petty crime in a particular area can present a pattern, and police can plan to deal with it.

Why People Don't Report Crimes

In a recent survey of farmers across New South Wales conducted by the Institute for Rural Futures, farmers provided some reasons for why they did not report farm crime to police. These included:

1. Lack of proof

It can be difficult to prove what, and how much livestock, crops, fuel or timber have been stolen.

You still need to report crimes: Even if you believe it will be impossible to prove, the police would prefer to know about the crime. Try to gather as much recent information as you can regarding the stolen livestock, equipment or fuel or whatever is missing. Police have stressed that it is vital that

farmers keep farm records up to date and ensure all stock and other farm produce are identified. All tools and machinery need to be engraved with some identification and their serial numbers and details should be recorded.

2. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if a crime has occurred

With small stock losses, there are always doubts about whether stock have merely strayed or have died from natural causes. Did we really use all that fuel this week?

You still need to report crimes: It is so important to ensure your farm records are up to date; stock records in particular.

Keep accurate records of all livestock bought and sold from your property. Record all births and deaths of livestock. Record all details of identification numbers. Take photographs or videos of particularly valuable animals.

Keep track of fuel purchases. Dip your tanks daily and monitor your fuel usage so that you know if there is an unexplained loss of fuel. Install a flow metre to supervise fuel use. Keep a book at the tank for each user to record fuel usage for various vehicles and machinery.

3. Time lag

Livestock can be stolen, transported and disposed of long before the theft is discovered. Producers can remain unaware of stock losses until mustering, which can be as infrequent as once a year on large properties. Unless stock are taken in large numbers, farmers may accept such losses as inevitable and do not report them.

You do need to report crimes: It is important to report thefts as soon as possible. However, even if some time has passed, police would still like to know about the theft in case there is a pattern of thefts in the district.

4. Why bother?

Many farmers believe that police are unable to catch offenders or recover stolen property and therefore it is a waste of time reporting crimes.

You do need to report crimes: police cannot solve crimes they do not know about. If people do not report crimes, the offenders will be rewarded by getting away with whatever they have done and will be encouraged to do it again.

5. Police don't understand

Some farmers think it is a waste of time reporting crimes because police (especially those from the city) have little knowledge or understanding of agricultural industries.

It is important that you report crimes: The Police Service is addressing this problem by providing training for officers in rural areas to better equip them for investigating these types of crimes. However, it is a lot to ask for officers to be knowledgeable about all the different breeds of stock and all the various rural industries. Therefore, when reporting a crime, it is in your best interest to ensure the officer understands all the information you provide.

6. The problem of living in a small community

Many farmers reported that living in a small community makes reporting a suspect in the district very difficult. For example, some farmers are experiencing livestock theft at the hands of a neighbour or someone in the close vicinity and reporting them would be more trouble than it was worth.

You do need to report crimes: police have complained that there is a code of secrecy among farmers in rural communities, which deny police the information required to secure a warrant and target offenders. Some people withhold information fearing retribution. Some will provide information to police on some criminal activity but will not name the suspect. The police need information to help them stop crime. Talk to your local police, explain the problems you are experiencing and there is every likelihood that they will be able to assist you without anyone knowing. You may also wish to seek legal advice from your local solicitor. Alternatively, you may prefer to report a crime or pass information police anonymously using the police hotlines (see below).

Reporting A Crime To Police

If you are unfortunate to be a victim of crime, your actions following the discovery of a crime can have considerable impact upon the success of the subsequent investigation by Police.

Upon discovery:

- **It is important that you report the crime to police as soon as possible.** Put together as much information as you can to give police; descriptions of the equipment, vehicle, or machinery stolen; the serial or chassis numbers, where the items were last located etc. Note any evidence at the scene, eg damage to locks or fences.

- When reporting the crime to police, 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.
- Try to recall any information that might be of use to officers in regard to suspicious people and vehicles.

When reporting thefts of livestock, you will need to provide police with information on the:

- Type of identification used and the identification numbers.
- Where the stock were located.
- When you last checked the stock.
- Any other relevant information.

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.
- 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.

OTHER MEANS OF REPORTING CRIMES

If you prefer not to report to your local Police Station, there are other ways. You may choose to report a crime anonymously using the Police Assistance Line or Crimestoppers.

The Police Assistance Line (PAL):

The Police Assistance Line is a 24-hour, free hotline available to the community for the reporting of **minor** crimes and incidents. PAL operates statewide throughout NSW all day, every day, all year. PAL's main contribution is to take non-urgent calls from the public to free up police in the field. You can call 131444 for the cost of a local call from anywhere in NSW.

Call information is immediately available to police statewide. The incidents are examined by local police to identify trends and determine if any follow up action is necessary. Where an immediate response is needed, officers will be despatched. The 000 number is always available for crimes in progress or other urgent situations. After a crime has been reported over the telephone, customers are provided with a reference number. It is important to retain this number for future reference.

Police Assistance Line	131444
Crimestoppers	1800 333 000
TTY	9211 3776

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/>

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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