

Crime behind the farm gate:

Preventing and policing farm crime in rural Victoria



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Stockholm Criminology Symposium

Tuesday 9 June 2015



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Research aims

- Examine types, extent and location of farm crime in Victoria
- Consider effect of farm crime economic/social wellbeing of rural/regional communities
- Outline existing policing practices and analyse alternatives
- Determine suite of strategies for prevention and control of crime against farms and for improvement of service delivery by CJS

Current research - methodology

- *Interviews:* with AGLOs; farmers; peak bodies; elected representatives; Government departments; business etc
- *Survey:*
 - qualitative and quantitative questions
 - Determine types and prevalence of farm crime (esp. thefts from farms)
 - Attitude survey re: to / responses by CJS

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vicfarmcrime>

What we know from previous Australian research

- Some State (but not National) research – incomplete picture
- Variety of methodologies and dated research
- Victimization high amongst farmers
- Impacts of crime are heightened at certain times – e.g. amidst drought

(Barclay et al 2001; Barclay 2003; Carcach 2002; Laid, Granville and Montgomery 1998/9; McCall and Homel 2003)

Farms are vulnerable to theft because of unique socio-demographic factors such as:

- Remoteness and distance between farms
- Access to the property
- Improved transport infrastructure
- Changing / unstable populations
- Relaxed attitudes to security
- Perpetrators are becoming more organised
- Has a crime been committed/evidence

Organised crime, drugs and guns

- The link between country and city crime
- Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs and rural crime – policy solutions and policing responses
- Organised crime and Victorian Farms: drugs, guns and other criminality
- Drugs – ‘ice’ and the ease of manufacture, trafficking (logistics and trucking) and sale (relationship between country and urban areas)
- Theft of long-barrelled firearms for modification / sale to urban markets (and linkage with OMGs)

Livestock

- Offending not difficult
- Motivations: food; breeding purposes; or financial gain by thieves with industry knowledge
- Delays in reporting thefts
- Lack of evidence
- National Livestock Identification System (but issues)
- Thieves – well-organised and equipped; highly skilled; operate by moonlight; ready market; leave scant evidence

Machinery, vehicles and other property

- Machinery and equipment, vehicles, tools and spare parts, fuel, produce, water, fertilisers and chemicals, and farm residences are targeted
- Vandalism, sabotage, illegal hunting, trespassing
- “It’s the property that is the biggest thing”
- Opportunistic theft but larger items stolen to order

Farmers reluctant to report crime because of:

- fear of revenge
- belief that police not able to do anything
- feeling that the crime not serious enough to report
- unable to prove ownership of stolen property
- not sure a crime has occurred
- too much time passed
- lack of evidence
- perception that police do not have agricultural knowledge
- offender was known / living in a small community
- farmer solved themselves (“we kill our own snakes”)
- hassles of the legal process/sentencing

(Victorian Farm Crime Survey 2014; NFCS 2000-2001; McCall and Homel 2003)

Rural mentality

- Overturn 'she'll be right' rural mentality
- Irregular livestock counts
- Tractors which are keyed alike
- Keys left in ignitions of unlocked vehicles and machines
- Sheds left unlocked
- Machinery left near roadsides out of sight of house

Crime prevention initiatives (1)

- Capable guardians: importance of neighbours; being aware of unusual behaviour; having farms look occupied; having a permanent or random presence on the farm, and physically being present
- Vigilance; staying alert
- Video surveillance and warning signage
- Locking farmhouses, vehicles, machinery, sheds and buildings
- Storing machinery out of sight of main roads
- The deterrence of a watchdog
- Sound perimeter fencing
- Installation of technological crime prevention techniques such as security lights and alarms

Crime prevention initiatives (2)

- **Courts:** sentencing; “a legal system that doesn’t treat the victims like criminals”
- **Public policy:** “better social welfare”
- **Sense of community:** “Work on getting every Australian to respect each other and their property”
- **Education:** farmer education; more police education on rural issues
- **Financial incentives:** subsidies for motion-activated cameras
- **Legislative change:** e.g. gun storage

Policing: Victoria's Agricultural Liaison Officers

- 47 AGLOs (performing role in addition to other detective duties)
- education of farm communities
- encourage crime prevention
- increase reporting rates (Crime Stoppers?)
- additional resourcing would allow concentration on building trust
- more detailed analysis, assessment and review of rural crime
- properly categorising farm crime to assist in identifying trends in Victoria, nationally and internationally, and allowing a greater strategic policing response

Other issues in brief

- policing strategies and tactics
- challenges for contemporary rural and regional policing
- community attitudes to rural and farm crime and CJS responses
- media reporting of crime
- animal welfare and activism
- rural health and crime (interpersonal violence; mental health; addiction)
- justice reinvestment in rural and regional Victoria: tackling the causes of crime and the costs of corrections
- juvenile justice

Questions and Discussion

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The survey:

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