

Rural crime

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why rural crime is on the rise, and what can be done to prevent it

Penn State researcher Daryl Steffensmeier reports that although the rural crime rate is still lower than urban crime overall, crime rates nationwide have increased substantially over the past 20 years with rural trends paralleling the national trends

In his studies at the university, Steffensmeier concentrated his efforts on the violent crime, murder

"Nationally, the incidence of rural murder has risen and is greater than the rate of increase for cities with populations under 100,000. The rate for the U.S. is 9.0 murders for every 100,000 people

"In metropolitan areas, the murder rate is 9.9 per 100,000 population. In nonmetro areas, suburbs and towns, where the population is under 50,000, the murder rate drops to 5.2 for every 100,000 people"

Compare with these statistics, the figure of 7.5 murders for each 100,000 people — that's the rural rate. This falls mid-way between city and suburban murder rates.

In studying these statistics, Steffensmeier stated the high murder rate in the rural areas of Pennsylvania and the U.S. can be accounted for by the fact that "the rural community has become more disintegrated by modern trends"

"People travel more and do fewer things together," he said "The sense of the close-knit, self-sufficient community is a thing of the past"

G. Howard Phillips, director of the rural crime prevention program at Ohio State echoed Steffensmeier's sentiments.

In the January, 1980 issue of Newline, a publication of the Rural Sociological Society, Phillips and colleagues stated, "Rural crime is increasingly becoming a manifest problem for our rural communities. Traditionally believed to be a social ill confined within city boundaries, crime in the country was perceived as quite manageable within the reigns of authority assigned our police and judicial resources"

He also pointed out the escalation rate of non-urban crime surpassed that of the largest cities "The crime rate for rural America for the 15-year period between 1963 and 1977 increased 351 percent," he reported

What has caused this dramatic rise in country crime?

Originally, the statistics were attributed to better police documentation and record-keeping. But, according to Phillips, "because the increase in rural crime incidents has occurred unabated and at a near steady rate for a period exceeding 20 years, it is difficult to envision a similar steady improvement in reporting procedures"

Although Steffensmeier's study documents the rising occurrence of violent crime, Ohio State research found vandalism to be at the top of the list for rural crime, running 38 percent of all reported cases in a survey of victims. Coming in a distant second, with 13 percent, was theft

Phillips pointed out there was a significant difference in police records and the data generated by the survey

According to police records, theft was the leading crime known to the authorities with a rate of 29 percent, with vandalism coming in second with 17 percent and burglary in third with 14 percent

Why the discrepancies?



The researchers found only 45 percent of the crimes on the survey questionnaires that had been committed were reported to the police by the victims

"Sixty-three percent of burglaries were reported whereas only 15 percent of cases of fraud were reported

Thus, the scope of the rural crime problem was at least twice as extensive as was known to police agencies"

When asked why they failed to report the crimes, the survey respondents' answers pointed to a feeling of uselessness

They eluded to the fact that crime was "difficult to enforce" and what enforcement was available was either too slow or too lenient. Others said they didn't want to get involved with all the red tape, or the value of the lost items didn't justify the time it would take. Still others didn't want to get someone they knew in trouble or feared reprisals against their property

Since the Ohio State study showed 90 percent of rural crime was oriented towards property, the fact the owners didn't want to risk further violations was understandable.

The study went on to look at who commits the acts of rural crime and who are the victims. The researchers also looked at ways of preventing or deterring crime.

These topics will be featured in two remaining stories in the next issues of Lancaster Farming.

Cattle on feed off 4 percent

LANCASTER — Cattle and calves on feed December 1 for slaughter market in the seven states preparing monthly estimates totaled 7.96 million head, down four percent from a year ago and off 15 percent from December 1, 1978, according to the Crop Reporting Board. Marketings of fed cattle during November totaled 1.35 million, down six percent from last year and 21 percent below November 1978.

Placements of cattle and calves on feed in the seven states during November were 1.65 million, off 11

percent from last year and 13 percent below November 1978.

Net placements of 1.53 million were off 10 percent and 12 percent, respectively, from last year and 2 years ago.

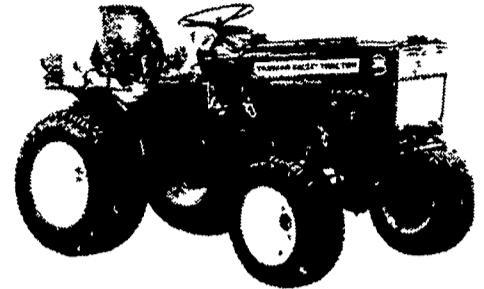
Other disappearance totaled 127 thousand compared with 158 thousand in November 1979 and 160 thousand in 1978.



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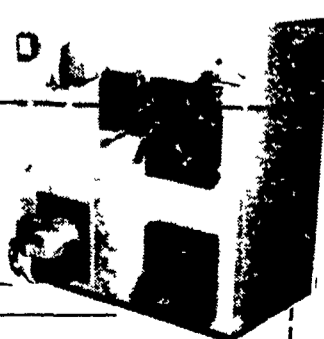
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