

Rural crime, where, when, how can it be stopped

BY SHEILA MILLER

LITITZ — Farmer Jones lives on a farm nestled in the rolling hills of Dauphin County — just north of the Blue Mountain and away from the urban pressure of Harrisburg.

Jones, who is a regular church-goer, feels he's safe from burglars and vandals because his buildings are set back a mile-long dirt lane, completely hidden from view of the road or the nearest neighbors.

Because he is getting up in years and living alone, Jones relies on the ears of his dog, Spark, to let him know when someone is out. And, just in case someone ever did try to rob him, Jones pats his trusty shotgun that he keeps cleaned and oiled — mainly for an occasional pheasant or rabbit during small game season.

Imagine Jones' surprise when he returns from church services one Sunday to find his tractor was mysteriously parked in the middle of the lane, most of his tools were scattered over the floor of his machine shop, and a motor running inside the barn left a sinking feeling in his stomach as he sensed his silage unloader had been switched on.

Shocked and dismayed, Jones scowled at the dog box where Spark resolutely stayed hidden from sight.

For those farmers, like Mr. or Ms. Jones (what ever gender fits the work boot), who think rural crime is something that only happens to the farmers on the outskirts of Philadelphia, the results of an Ohio State study on environmental factors in rural crime may come as quite a surprise.

According to the research, it was found that a number of things thought to encourage a property to be vandalized or burglarized had no bearing on its susceptibility — while other factors thought to insure a property against being victimized actually did not.

Looking at Jones assumption he was safe, the Ohio State researchers pointed out rural residents living in an area of rolling land are more likely to be vandalized than those living on flat or hilly land.

The study, conducted in 1975 on rural Ohioans, also pointed out church members were more often victims of vandalism than non-church members. However, there was no significant difference between church members and non-church members when it came to burglary and theft, they said.

One hypothesis the researchers came up with for church members to be vandalized more frequently than non-church members was because they leave their properties unattended for longer periods of time. The Ohio State study also pointed out acts of vandalism on a church member may be witness to the 'vandals' frustrations with community norms.

The survey report revealed rural residences located in a secluded area and hidden from view had a slightly higher percentage for being victimized than neighboring properties located in a more visible area.

The Ohio State team of experts also looked at whether or not visibility of buildings to neighbors had an influence on rural crime



prevention. They found, however, this factor did not relate to whether or not a property was victimized.

The distance the farm is located away from a town or city did come into play, though, in the results of the

research. While distance did not seem to be a factor for burglaries, the study showed a linear decrease in theft and vandalism as the distance from town increased.

What about the distance of buildings from the road?

Will a property be less likely to experience property crimes if the house is closer to the road than the barn?

From their findings the researchers stated, "Theft and vandalism are less likely to occur when the dwelling house is the building closest to the road. This is not true for the crime of burglary. There were no differences in the number of burglaries and house location."

The researchers also looked at barn location. Their data did not significantly support the theory that barns closest to a public road are most often vandalized or robbed. But, the report stated all three property crime areas studied had a higher percentage of crimes where the barn was closest.

Just how far does the barn have to be from the road to be safe?

For burglary and vandalism, it makes no difference. But where theft is concerned, the researchers stated, Rural residents

with non-residential buildings 100 feet from a road have the highest percentage of thefts, while those with non-residential buildings between 100 and 499 feet have the lowest.

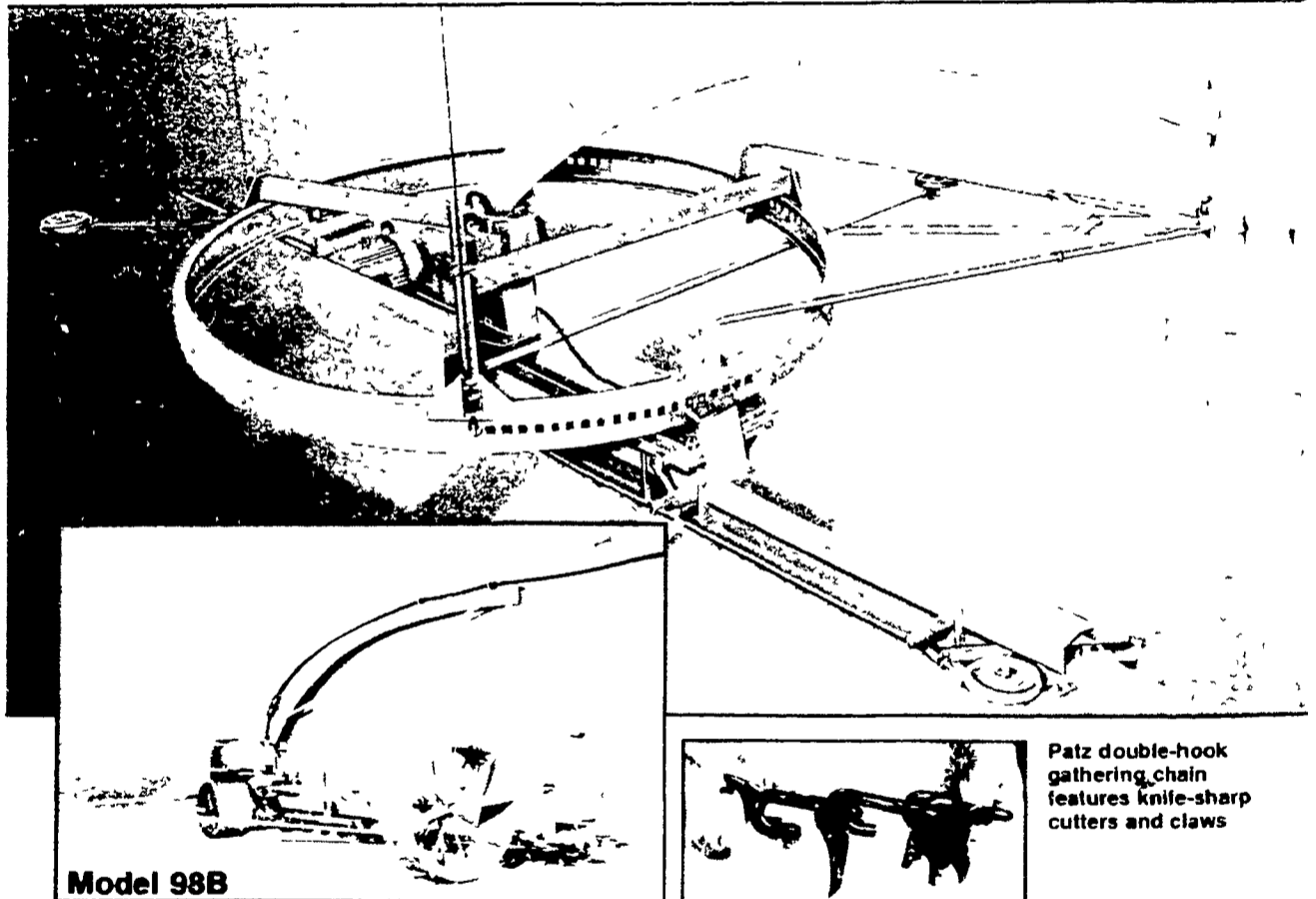
Will a farm with a large number of buildings be more likely to be victimized than a farm with only a barn and house?

Even though the number of buildings might seem to reflect a farmer's affluence and offer more nooks and crannies for potential vandals and thieves to lurk, the Ohio State study found the total number of buildings on a farm or residential tract did not relate to burglary, theft, or vandalism.

Surprisingly, what comes into play is the condition of the buildings. The researchers asked respondents in their survey on rural crime to rate their buildings for overall condition — excellent, good, fair or poor.

After pouring over the data, it was determined that the chances of burglary (Turn to Page D3)

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