

Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

With all of the reports about crime in the city, it's easy to overlook the problems of crime on the farm.

Statistically, it doesn't show up as much, but farmers and farm organizations are worried about a spiraling crime rate in rural America that runs that gamut from breaking and entering to cattle rustling.

There was a time when there wasn't much around a farm worth stealing, except perhaps some livestock and that was hard to

move, disguise, or even resell. But nowadays big-time agriculture means big investments in equipment and supplies, and that makes it a prime target for burglary.

Today's farms are just loaded with burglarable items, and yet the general level of concern and security in agriculture is appalling. It's nothing to see a \$100,000 combine, or a \$50,000 tractor left standing in the middle of a field overnight during the busy harvest season, or parked in an unlocked or open-fronted shed a

half-mile or more from human inhabitants for an entire winter. What an inviting target for an agricultural thief—one who specializes in farm items.

These guys know the value of modern agricultural inputs. They know how to get onto a farm and get off in a hurry and take with them just those things of marketable value that are easy to peddle.

One such farm thief was interviewed recently. He said he specialized in farm burglaries because they were easy and profitable. He estimated an annual take of \$80,000 — tax free — and figured he could easily steal \$2000 worth a day, even more if he went for large machinery.

This particular bandit stole anything of value — tractors, livestock, fuel, antiques, even copper wire. And he said it usually was quite easy.

This guy's preferred method of operation would be to ride around the country in the daytime, looking for a place with unmowed grass in

the summer or unshoveled snow in the driveway in the winter. He would watch for other signs of activity and note hazardous conditions such as security systems, barnyard lights and barking dogs.

When he found a likely place he would return later, usually at night, with the proper vehicle to haul away whatever he was after. He would drive right up to the door, and if no one answered, it was open house.

Surprisingly, this thief said farmers are genial hosts, hardly ever locking their homes, and securing valuable equipment and supplies with flimsy locks and lightweight hasps. Entry was usually easy and escape, due to the relative isolation of the selected farm site, was hardly ever a problem.

So what does this thief think farmers should do to keep from being ripped off by the agrarian bandits?

* A loud-barking dog — no

professional thief wants to tangle with one of them.

* Plenty of lights at night, a radio playing in the house and in the barn.

* A lived-in appearance by keeping the grass mowed, the mail and papers picked up and cars in the driveway.

* Good locks on all doors and windows for all buildings where things of value are kept.

* A security system — professionals will pass them up rather than take a chance on tripping an alarm. Even one of those signs that says the place is protected by a security system is an important deterrent.

Never leave machinery and livestock or other valuable items where they can't be watched. There have been many instances of modern cattle rustling where a farmer would lose several animals from a herd kept some distance from the farmstead and not even for several days they were gone.

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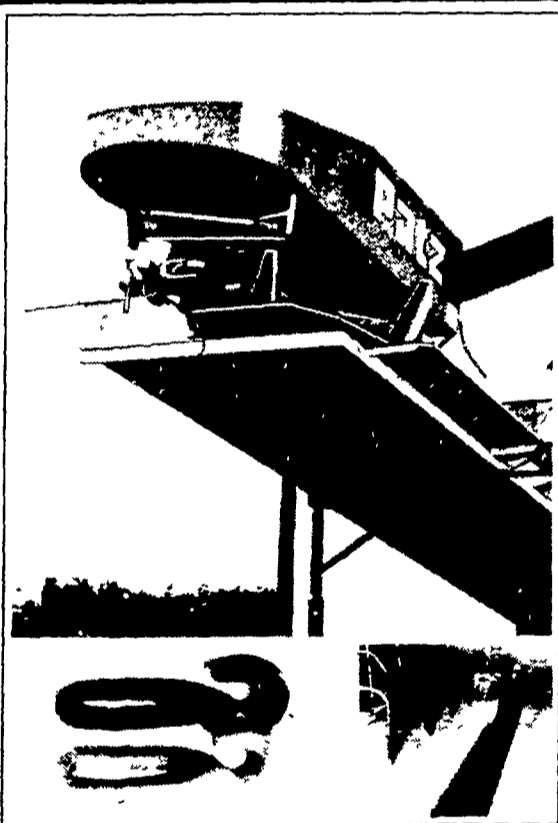
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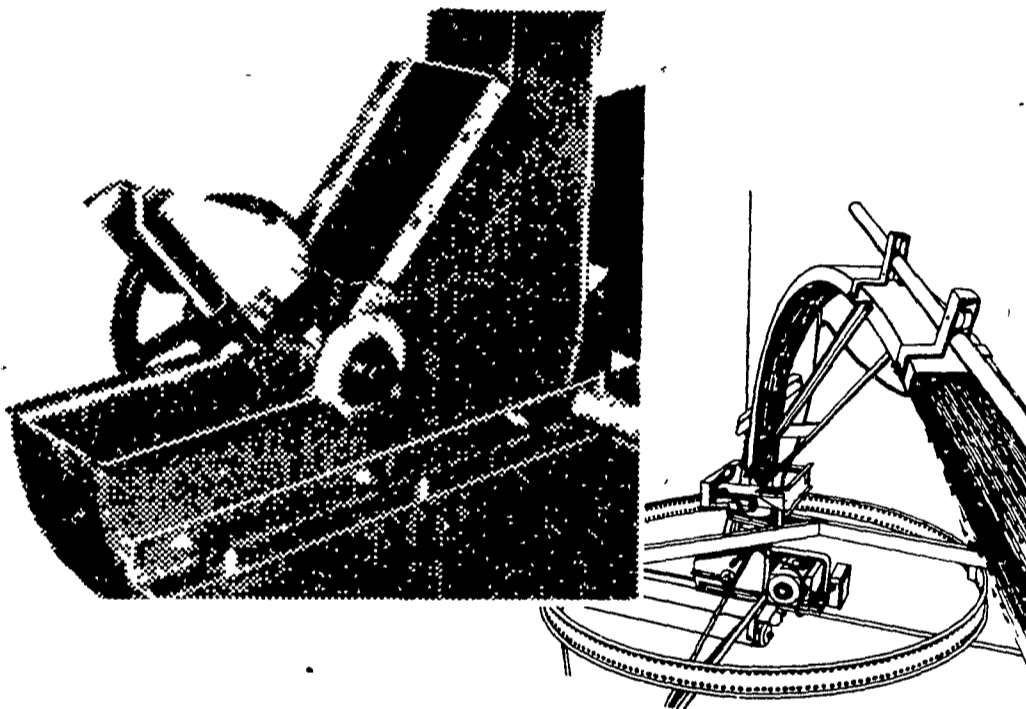
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