

Stop Rural Crime

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— Although newspapers every day have stories of rising crime in America's cities and suburbs, living in rural Pennsylvania is no guarantee a thief won't strike your farm next.

According to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (CCD), rural crime is also on the increase. In fact, Barbara Woodruff, who has been studying rural crime for 1 year as a Community Development Agent with the Penn State Extension Service, said the number of crimes per capita is actually greater in rural areas of the state than in urban centers.

People who live in the country generally may be less security-conscious than their city cousins, according to the CCD.

Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Allen Evans of the Indiana station agrees. "Rural people have lived for so long without any problems, with leaving their equipment out in the fields and without locking up buildings," he said. "But with crime on the increase everywhere, they're going to have to be more urban in their thinking."

Security lighting is also generally less prevalent than in cities, and much of rural Pennsylvania falls under the protection of Pennsylvania State Police patrols, which have wide areas to cover.

Despite the increase in rural crime, it may be that most of the incidents are property crimes rather than attacks against people. Burglary is at the top of the list.

Here are some tips from the CCD, Ms. Woodruff and Trooper Evans on how to discourage burglars and thieves and beef up security around your farm and home.

Lock up: Since most burglars

are looking for easy access, good locks are your best line of defense.

Deadbolt locks on all exterior doors, and double cylinder locks on doors with glass panels and windows, are best.

According to CCD, the locks should have a one-inch throw (the length of the bolt when extended from the door.)

Remember to lock up even during the day when working around the outside of your home. A surprising number of burglaries occur in broad daylight. And don't forget locks for garages, sheds and other outbuildings as well as your house.

Light up: Another major deterrent to burglars is good security lighting. To a certain extent, the relative isolation of many rural homes and farms can be offset by outdoor lighting around houses, garages, sheds and barns.

Lights over driveways and lanes can also help identify who's coming and going. Making your home look occupied - even when it's not! Typically burglars look for homes and other targets of opportunity where no one is at home. Anything you can do to give the impression there are people around will discourage intruders.

While you're away, the CCD suggests leaving some lights on or a radio playing, again, even during the daytime.

If you're going to be away for more than one day, it's a good idea to have a neighbor pick up your mail and newspaper, mow the lawn or plow out the driveway.

And one of the oldest deterrents to burglars is still one of the best: an alert dog which barks at strange noises. To prevent stealing: If at all possible, don't leave equipment and implements out in fields away from buildings and well-lit areas.

Entire pieces of equipment can

be towed away or loaded on trucks, and individual components, such as batteries, can be easily removed. According to Ms. Woodruff, rural thieves have a new favorite item from parked equipment: hydraulic cylinders.

If vehicles or implements must be left in fields, lock them. A method the military has used for decades to secure vehicles is to padlock a chain run through the steering wheel so the vehicle can't be turned.

Such a precaution is especially effective for small vehicles such as lawn tractors, Ms. Woodruff said. Once the front wheels are turned as far as they will go in one direction and the steering wheel is chained, it's nearly impossible to push the tractor onto a truck.

Bicycle locking cables work well also, she said.

The CCD reminds farmers to keep their vehicles locked when not in use. The only thing more frustrating than having some of your equipment stolen is to have the thief haul it away in your own pickup truck.

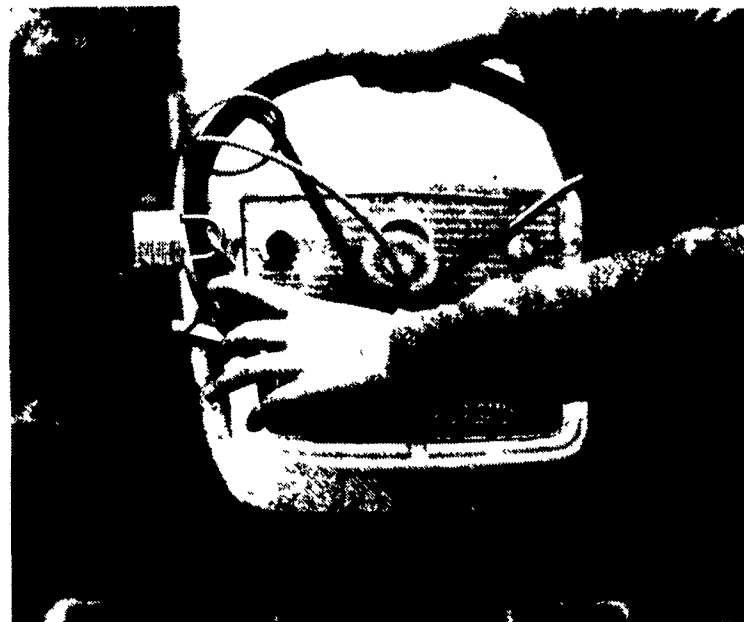
If you own property away from your main farm, avoid storing grain and equipment there. And don't forget to padlock gas tanks. A free tank of gas is often as tempting as other merchandise, and it takes longer to realize it's missing.

There is a new trend of rural thefts developing: crop thefts. Ms. Woodruff said with the current popularity of woodburning stoves and fireplaces, standing timber and even lumber is often stolen.

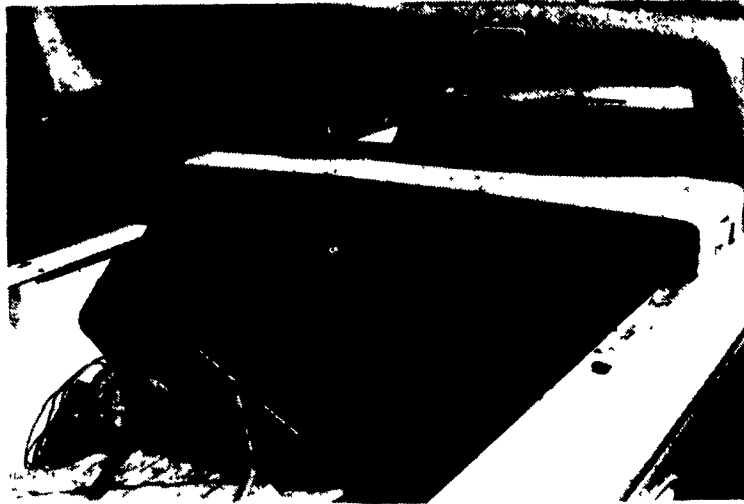
Indiana County Christmas tree grower J.D. Fleming estimates his farm loses about 250 Christmas trees to thieves each fall before the holidays. One year his workers discovered about one-half acre of a plantation - about 500 trees - had been dug up and removed, roots and all.

To prevent crop thefts, Mr. Fleming said, it's best to patrol fields as much as possible, limit access roads wherever possible, and encourage neighbors to keep an eye on your fields.

Even if the above steps don't



A lawn tractor, with its wheels turned and a bicycle locking cable looped through the steering wheel, is nearly impossible for thieves to push onto a truck.



Equipment left in the bed of a pickup — especially power tools and chain saws — are easy pickings for thieves.

prevent some of your property from being stolen, one other measure may help bring it back home.

Operation Identification is a problem designed to trace stolen property and return it to its rightful owner. A special engraving tool is used to mark an identifying number in a prominent location on tools and equipment. Ms. Wood-

ruff emphasizes that anyone marking equipment with an engraver should use their Pennsylvania Operators/Drivers License number. Law enforcement agencies nationwide have access to those numbers, she said, and even if a stolen item is recovered in California, it can be traced back to its Pennsylvania owner.



Sheds and garages, with securely locked doors and good security lighting, discourage intruders.



Implements left parked in a field near a rural road are susceptible to theft or vandalism.

Homestead Notes