

Rural Theft Increases

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a low boy truck to get my tractor. "My neighbors advised me not to prosecute, but I went ahead anyway. We finally got the thief into the court room and then settled out of court for \$1500."

While many farmers, like Robinson's neighbors, fear reprisal if they report and prosecute thieves, an enforcement officer said it doesn't work that way. The officer said that if you let the thief go, he'll do it again. If you prosecute him, you let him know you know who he is and he becomes the suspect for any other crime in the area.

Barbara Woodruff, Penn State extension community development director, who works out of Lewistown in Mifflin County, said that for machinery, thieves often use a flat bed truck to pick up equipment parked away from the farm buildings. "The truck may even have a fake farm equipment dealer's name on the cab door," Woodruff said. "For cattle, the thieves use a cattle truck, drop the tail gate and shove the animals onto the truck. Young animals like calves, colts and lambs are prime targets."

Within the past few weeks an Amish farmer in southern Lancaster County reported four Holstein calves missing from their hutches. In Franklin County, farmers have had a series of thefts, many related to the milk house facilities.

Douglas Reinhart farms on the outskirts of Chambersburg. "This was the worst week of my life," Reinhart said. "The milk inspector called and said we had contaminated a compartment on the milk tank truck. I said that could not be, because we had no treated animals on the farm."

But when every animal in Reinhart's 160-head Jersey herd was tested, three cows had been mysteriously treated with antibiotics and were contaminating the milk

in the bulk tank. Tools were also stolen from the farm shop and two hydraulic cylinders were taken from the corn and hay choppers.

"These cylinders were taken from equipment sitting right behind the barn," Reinhart said. "It had to be done by someone who knew something about farming."

John Shearer, Franklin County agent, said dairy farmers in his county have experienced a series of incidents where six or eight bulk tanks on that many farms were contaminated. In every case the vandalism was done by someone who knows something about the items around the milk house.

Dr. Arthur Cosby, Mississippi State University, has studied rural crime as part of his work in the sociology department. Cosby said pesticides and ag chemicals are prime targets of theft because of their small volume and high value. He said a real problem exists because items around the farm lack serial numbers and other means of identification.

For Benjamin Shank, Holtwood, in Lancaster County, his Farmall M that disappeared from the same field where his son was raking hay is very identifiable because it is an antique. "Some guys like the old tractors because they worked with them as boys," Shank said.

But Shank's antique tractor was driven out of the field in broad daylight and has not been seen again. "I still half believe that a kid drove it off and left it in the woods," Shank said. "It's worth more as an antique than any real field work value."

To solve a rural theft crime, you need to be able to give positive identification of the items that are stolen. Woodruff suggests that you mark tools with spray paint. Spray the handles with fluorescent green or yellow and stick your thumb print in the wet paint. In addition, you can chisel marks or drill holes



Theft Watch

(A column for farmers and agribusiness to report missing and found machinery, tools and livestock. Call (717) 394-3047 with these reports.)

• Douglas Reinhart, Chambersburg, Franklin County, had farm tools taken from his farm shop and two hydraulic cylinders removed from corn and hay choppers. Milk was also contaminated in the bulk tank. Anyone with information about this crime should call (717) 261-0927.

• Benjamin Shank, Holtwood, Lancaster County, had a Farmall M antique tractor driven out of the field in broad daylight. He thinks it may have been driven into the woods and left set. Anyone with information about this crime should call (717) 284-4820.

• Frank Robinson, Bowie, Maryland, had a tractor and chisel plow stolen on a Sunday morning. He has recovered the tractor but the plow is still missing. Anyone with information about this crime should call (301) 262-9037.

in the frame of your larger equipment. Then tell the local police how you have marked your tools and equipment.

The Michigan Crime Prevention Center says farmers should install high-efficiency lighting systems in areas where equipment will be stored and they should keep valuable supplies and small animals visible from the house.

If you must leave your heavy equipment in the field, make sure

you park it where it's readily visible from the neighbor's house. Work out some arrangement whereby you can park tractors, combines, and other valuable equipment in each other's yards.

Use a small out-building or corner of the barn for storing maintenance equipment, tools, fertilizers, and other easily moveable belongings. The solid core door with a dead-bolt lock or hardened steel alloy hasp and padlock should be visible from your house. The door should open inward so the hinges are not exposed.

Drawn implements, irrigation pumps, and other equipment left outside should be chained and locked securely. Power driven implements should be equipped with hidden ignition kill switches. Remove the distributor rotor to prevent hit-wiring. Keep fencing and gates in good repair and locked.

"Because our only current means of coping with theft is through the police, and because the police are engaged in more serious matters, thieves are having a field day at the expense of farmers," Robinson said. "I suggest that Lancaster Farming create a column of 'missing equipment' whereby a theft can be quickly reported throughout the farming community. Thefts would have to be reported by the owner and the report published as soon as possi-

ble in order to be effective.

The reports should include a description of the equipment, location, date it was noticed missing, and name and phone number of the owner, together with any reward offered," Robinson said. "Under this scheme, a person spotting a piece of stolen equipment would contact the owner, who in turn would take the matter up with the local police. I believe the police would act quickly if they had good information on which to act. Participation by Lancaster Farming would end with the publication of the reports."

In response to Robinson's comments, and a small survey of other farmers, Lancaster Farming will publish reports of stolen items for farmers and agribusiness free of charge. The owner of the stolen item should call the news department as soon as possible after the item has been reported missing to the local police. Be prepared to give the name, identification and/or description of the item and any reward for its recovery. The notice will be run for several weeks to help alert those who may unwittingly purchase the stolen goods and to help the owner to recover stolen property. A sample of the column is published with this story.

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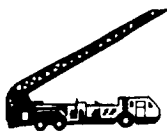
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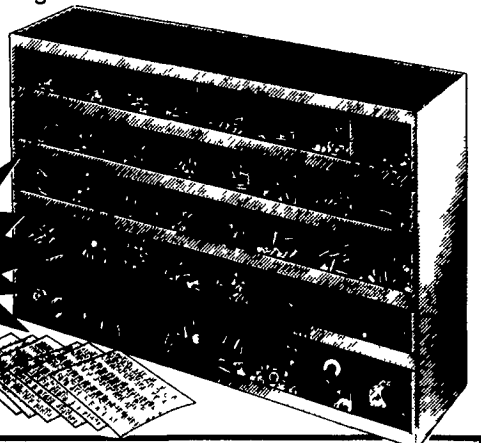
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