

COMBATTING

RURAL CRIME

A CONSISTENT & COORDINATED APPROACH TO RURAL CRIME

The NFU is committed to making sure that farmers are not seen as a 'soft target' for criminals. Peaceful rural places may seem to be the last place to find criminal activity, but farming communities are often subject to a range of serious crimes. Many farms have experienced these crimes for generations, but NFU members are reporting dramatic increases in incidents and are feeling more vulnerable. Hare coursing, fly-tipping on farmland, dog attacks on livestock and theft of large and small machinery are some of the issues that NFU members are increasingly experiencing at the moment. These crimes have much wider knock on effects on the farm business.

The NFU has found that there is no standard protocol across constabularies for combatting rural crime. Some police forces do not treat rural crimes as serious crimes, giving criminals the opportunity to target farm businesses. The NFU is calling on the UK Government to recognise the serious impacts that rural crime has on farm businesses and the wider rural community.

Some forces have recognised the serious nature of rural crime and are achieving success in tackling it. We call on Government to take the lead to ensure that all constabularies adopt this best practice. Government should form a cross-departmental rural crime task force to ensure a coordinated approach between government departments, government agencies, Police & Crime Commissioners, Chief Constables and local authorities to address the failures in dealing with rural crime.

Our farming communities are facing fear and intimidation from groups of criminals and this has severe impacts on agricultural businesses. This in turn impacts both the local and national economy. Many constabularies recognise that the majority of rural crime is organised crime and is linked to rural, heritage and wildlife crime, but there is generally a lack of evidence to back this up.

Dealing with rural crime in a consistent and coordinated way will begin to ensure that the approach to rural crime in the UK is not a postcode lottery.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Minette Batters'.

Minette Batters,
Deputy President NFU



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen James'.

Stephen James,
President NFU Cymru

INTRODUCTION

Rural crime is very different from urban crime. It often severely impacts the farm business. For example the theft of high value machinery that cannot be replaced swiftly puts timely agricultural operations at risk. Crimes on farm often involve significant damage and the rural nature of farm businesses can make them difficult to secure. Perpetrators will often use threatening behaviour if confronted, this puts rural communities and individuals at risk. To compound this issue many rural locations are remote and so police response times are lengthened.

The National Rural Crime Network has found **“a vicious circle of low expectations, leading to chronic under-reporting, anger, frustration and worry. The result is increasing fear of crime and significantly lower satisfaction levels in the police than the national average”.**

The NFU has also found that dissatisfaction with the 101 system for reporting crime, combined with the fear of violent retribution from criminals, is also contributing to under-reporting. Variations in the way that crimes are reported mean that it is difficult to obtain a realistic picture of the true extent of rural crime. Some farm crimes can be recorded in a way which does not reflect the rural nature of that crime. The theft of a tractor, for example, may be recorded simply as vehicle theft as opposed to rural crime.

Rural crimes experienced by NFU members include:

- Theft of major equipment, tractors, all-terrain vehicles, diesel, chemicals and livestock
- Theft of chainsaws and other plant machinery
- Livestock worrying
- Hare coursing
- Poaching
- Heritage crime
- Arson & vandalism

These are often linked to civil matters including:

- Trespass – including illegal encampments and damage by off-road vehicles
- Fly-tipping
- Fly grazing

Fly-tipping is a problem that affects two thirds of farmers. When incidents of fly-tipping take place on private land it is the landowner's responsibility to remove the illegally dumped waste. It can be costly and time-consuming to remove, dangerous to human health, wildlife and livestock and in some cases pollute watercourses and contaminate land. It should not be the sole responsibility of the land owner to deal with this crime.

Hare coursing involves dogs being used to kill the animals for entertainment and gambling. It is illegal throughout the UK.

Hare coursers give no consideration to landowner's property and crops, and coursing is often associated with violence. Coursers often have a sophisticated information network and they invariably know about vulnerable properties in the area, short cuts, and escape routes.

Farmers often work alone in the field, and NFU members are experiencing fear, intimidation and threats of violence as large gangs descend on their property.

Hare coursing activity rises in late summer once fields have been harvested. In this period, hare numbers are still high and the dogs have wide, unobstructed areas to run across.

NFU members also report a pattern of crimes associated with illegal hare coursing, the act of coursing involves trespass, criminal damage, illegal gambling and wildlife crime, but NFU members also report that organised criminals will use the opportunity to scout for other criminal opportunities on the farm with the prospects of thefts occurring a few weeks later.

IN THIS REPORT, THE NFU ASKS:

Key Challenges for UK Government

The NFU asks the UK government to form a **cross-departmental rural crime task force**. This must ensure the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and all relevant departments, including the Welsh Government, and the Departments for Environment Food & Rural Affairs and Communities & Local Government, work together with Police & Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and police to address the failures in dealing with rural crime.

The NFU asks government to consult with all stakeholders to **agree a definition of rural crime** that can be used to inform consistent policy decisions and to enable accurate recording and target setting.

The NFU ask the Home Office to ensure **fair funding for rural policing**.

The NFU calls for the Sentencing Council to review the range of rural crimes experienced by farming communities to ensure **sentencing guidelines** reflect the true cost and impact of these crimes, and contain up-to-date information about the penalties that act as a disincentive for these crimes.

The NFU calls for more **funding for research** to understand rural crime and its links to organised criminal networks. The NFU asks that the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research prioritise research on how organised crime groups are operating in rural areas in the UK.

Key Challenges for Police & Crime Commissioners

The NFU asks Police & Crime Commissioners to **prioritise rural crime as a strategic objective** and work together to ensure effective cross border policing.

Key Challenges for Chief Constables

The NFU calls for Chief Constables to ensure that each police force has a **dedicated rural police team**.

The NFU calls for the police to have access to **modern communication technology** to be able to offer a consistent and reliable system for reporting crimes and to facilitate effective cooperation with the rural community.

The NFU propose investment in and **development of the 101 system** to ensure it can be an effective national single non-emergency number. An effective 101 system will allow the rural community to report all non-emergency incidents, from hare coursing to fly-tipping, and ensure the incident is dealt with appropriately.

The NFU calls for **consistent training** across constabularies:

- To provide an understanding of farm businesses
- To give officers an overview of the farming calendar
- To understand the impact of the various types of rural crime

This training should be an ongoing requirement, given to all officers who have anything to do with rural areas.

The NFU calls on the police to find ways to **train control room staff in farm issues**. This could include more innovative training practices and materials, including explanations for keywords and pictures. This training needs to be ongoing to account for the turnover of control room staff.

THE NFU OFFERS TO:

Work with the UK government and the Welsh government to find positive solutions to the NFU's Key Challenges

Work with each Police & Crime Commissioner to agree how to address the strategic objective of rural crime

Work with the National Police Chiefs Council lead on Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs to support an effective national strategy on policing rural crime

Work with every police force to offer farm visits and dialogue with NFU members to support training and understanding of farm issues for officers

THE IMPACTS OF RURAL CRIME

HARE COURSING

Region: East Anglia

One NFU member (Farmer A) in Cambridgeshire shared his experience with us but was unwilling to put a name and face to his story for fear of retribution from the criminals who hare course on his land. This highlights the constant fear that this farmer is living in. He is worried not only for his safety but also that of his family, with his girlfriend afraid to walk the dogs and his three young daughters not allowed out of the house alone during coursing season. He believes that the criminals who course on his land are often repeat offenders, and he reports that they are very unpleasant people who use violence and intimidation. He is therefore unwilling and scared to confront them. This means that without police support they are left to cause significant damage to his land. And the problem is getting worse; hare coursing events are being reported on an almost daily basis in the farm's locality.

One particularly worrying event was experienced in February 2017; Farmer A's land was *'totally bombarded'* by a group of coursers made up of thirty vehicles and up to sixty people. It was a terrifying ordeal.

Farmer A is keen to point out that the dynamics of hare coursing have changed significantly in the past 20 years; *'modern day hare coursing doesn't respect any rules or seasons'*, which means farmers have to *'fortify farms to prevent these people from gaining access'*.

Everyday farming activities are seriously impeded by this 'fortification'. There is a cost associated with making the defences and securing farmland and then there is the issue of having to work around any defence measures put in place. Farmer A said *'you are unable to conduct your business as you want'*.

For Farmer A, having to conduct his everyday life and farm business in constant fear of hare coursers is the most significant impact of the crime. Whilst he has made some steps towards preventing hare coursing on his land he is keen to point out that prevention is a very complex issue and is something that cannot solely be addressed at farm level.

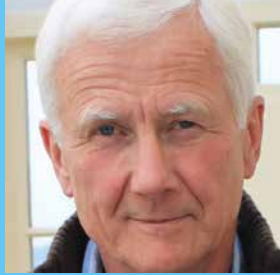


"you feel very, very uneasy on your own property" – Farmer A

THEFT

Region: South East

The Scotts have farmed on their 500 acre arable farm for the past 42 years. Theft of machinery and other equipment has always been an issue but in recent years the problem has worsened. The family are at their wits end. Over the last year they have been the victim of two violent, almost copycat robberies.



The first robbery took place in August 2016. In response to this Mr Scott and his son installed a range of extra security measures at a cost of £15,000. However, these extensive security measures failed to deter the criminal gangs targeting the Scotts and in March 2017 they were the victim of another robbery.

This incident took place in the yard just metres from the main farm house. Thieves used a stolen vehicle to pull the yard gates from their hangings and gain access. They then used the vehicle to rip the doors from a locked and alarmed container where valuable equipment and the ATV were stored.

The yard security light and container alarm alerted Mr Scott to the incident in progress and he ran to try and deter the criminals. This confrontation left Mr Scott very vulnerable and he was met with a barrage of physical violence. The criminals threw objects at him and he was hit with a blunt instrument. This attack left Mr Scott requiring hospital treatment for wounds to his head and arms.

Despite all the extra security measures, at a significant cost to their business, the organised criminals targeting the Scotts were obviously unperturbed. Mr Scott feels that they have been left with no more options for protecting themselves or their property without intervention from decision-makers.



FLY-TIPPING

Member: Rupert Inkpen
Region: West Midlands

Rupert has constant issues with fly-tipping on the 320 acres that he farms near Solihull. There is a fly-tipping event on his land on a weekly basis with domestic waste being dumped every weekend, varying in size from small rubbish bags to loads of white goods. In October 2016 Rupert was the victim of an industrial dumping incident, a large lorry load of commercial waste was deposited on his land near Hockley Heath. The dumpers used an angle grinder to break the lock on the gate and gain access. The rubbish blocked the track into the field and impeded access. The cost of removal and disposal of the waste was borne by Mr Inkpen, this amounted to around £800. In the same week two of Mr Inkpen's neighbours also experienced two commercial size fly-tipping events, highlighting the scale of the issue.

Mr Inkpen ensures that all his gates are locked in an effort to prevent access for these criminals, however, organised criminals come prepared to force entry, breaking locks and gates.

“we don't want to block gates, we need to have access to our land and it makes farming inefficient and time-consuming if we have to drive around with a forklift to move blockades before we can do our daily work” – R.Inkpen

DEALING WITH RURAL CRIME: EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The formation of a dedicated Rural Crime Team within a force is the most effective and preferred way to allocate resource and officers to tackle the issue of rural crime. However, the NFU knows that there are only a handful of forces in England and Wales who have a Rural Crime Team. The NFU is under no illusion that the cost and resource need associated with the provision of a Rural Crime Team is something which would be difficult to achieve across the board in the current system. An alternative approach which has been taken by some forces has been the creation of a Rural Policing Strategy. Whilst this does go some way towards addressing the issues with dealing with rural crime, we know that such an approach is most effective when implemented by a dedicated Rural Crime Team. The following pages highlight areas where the NFU has identified good practise in the approach to rural crime.

In highlighting examples of good practice the NFU is looking to the UK Government to take the lead on the sharing of best practise between forces, this will ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to rural crime across all force areas.

NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE RURAL CRIME TASKFORCE

Background:

The Rural Crime Taskforce was established in April 2016 as part of North Yorkshire Police's Rural Crime Strategy. Chief Constable Dave Jones recognised the value of having a specific team with expertise on particular rural issues.

The taskforce works alongside officers in North Yorkshire Police who have existing knowledge on rural crime to ensure that best practice is shared and a consistent approach to rural crime is taken throughout the force.

Implementation

Officers: Inspector, Sergeant, seven PCs, seven PCSOs, a Rural Policing coordinator and an Intelligence Analyst.

Engagement: PCs and PCSOs engage with rural communities on a variety of platforms and through partnerships with different stakeholders, such as the NFU.

Direct contact details: Provide local communities with direct contact details to ensure that there is a direct point of contact in addition to 101 and 999.

Provide feedback: Key focus placed on reporting the outcome of investigations back to those who made the initial report with the aim of improving

confidence in police and encouraging further reporting.

Rural watch schemes: Promoting and supporting rural watch schemes, allocate resource and provide live time police support for watches to report into. Dales Watch is a good example of a rural watch initiative. North Yorkshire Police recognise the invaluable support of these schemes particularly for rural and cross-border crime, they recognise the need for a two way partnership and ensure that they provide follow-up feedback so that groups can see the outcome of their endeavours.

Guidance and education: The taskforce recognises



Aim:

- To raise confidence levels in rural inhabitants to improve their perception of police and encourage increased reporting
- Done through improved engagement and crime reduction

that credibility within the rural community is paramount, members of the taskforce receive practical training with the support of agricultural colleges, working farms and the NFU.

The taskforce provides tools for officers to deal with rural crime issues. This has come in the form of a guidance pack on poaching. The 'Poaching Pack' is available for all officers in marked cars in North Yorkshire. This includes all the necessary information an officer would require when dealing with a poaching incident and is designed to be used by officers who may have had no previous experience of the rural crime.

NORTH WALES RURAL CRIME TEAM

The North Wales Rural Crime Team was set up in 2013, and is now in its fourth year. The team consists of 12 dedicated members headed up by Rob Taylor. It is one of the largest in the UK, and the remit is based on farm and wildlife crime.

Since the formation of the team, wildlife crime has dropped by a staggering 88%, although cases such as badger baiting and even dolphin disturbances are still reported. One of the most prevalent issues which the team deals with is dog attacks on livestock with figures showing a large increase in reported cases. More common types of crime such as All Terrain Vehicle theft have had a marked reduction since the formation of the team.

Despite having a relatively large number of dedicated officers for a team of this type, the team has shown itself to provide the highest value team within the force. The team is very active in engaging with other regions on rural crime matters, with their outreach extending as far as New Zealand for best practice sharing.

The team has fully embraced social media. By showcasing their work they are simultaneously improving their public perception as well as deterring would be criminals. In addition to social media, the team is also a regular fixture at countryside shows and events. A direct line of contact for each officer as an alternative to the 101 system has proven effective.

NFU MUTUAL

NFU Mutual is supporting a number of initiatives aiming to reduce rural crime. These initiatives are based on the premise that working in partnership with various stakeholders and sharing information is key to reducing rural crime in the long-term.

National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service

In 2010 NFU Mutual joined forces with the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) to support the services of an Agricultural Vehicle Police Officer.

Aim: To reduce the number of agricultural vehicle thefts and to recover stolen vehicles from the UK and abroad.

Success? As a result of this partnership incidences of agricultural vehicle theft are decreasing.

Plant & Agricultural National Intelligence Unit

NFU Mutual is one of nine funding stakeholders from the insurance industry supporting the Plant & Agricultural National Intelligence Unit (PANIU).

Aim: To assist in the accurate recording of theft data and then gather and disseminate the intelligence nationally.

Success? This scheme has gone a significant way in aiding police investigations into the criminal networks who steal plant and agricultural machinery. This is particularly important at a time when it appears that organised crime is on the rise.

THE LANCASHIRE LIVESTOCK INITIATIVE

In the past, farmers have had few effective means by which to deter and bring livestock thieves to justice. In addition, police have not had the facilities to identify or handle livestock when they are recovered.

The brainchild of NFU member John Taylor, the Lancashire Livestock Initiative now involves the NFU, NFU Mutual, Lancashire police, auction markets and a range of organisations working together to identify suspicious livestock, and to care for them if they are found to be stolen.

If the animals need to be retained, auction markets and local farmers make up a database of people who will provide care and accommodation. As part of the scheme, police have had training on identification, handling, paperwork and fitting evidence tags to animals that continue their journey, in order to prevent future theft of the same animal.



The 2015 data from NFU Mutual reveals that the cost of rural crime to the UK has reached

£42.5 MILLION

See more at:
<https://tinyurl.com/ycgocp9t>

HAMPSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Hampshire Constabulary has its own Strategic Rural Policing Inspector who oversees a team of Country Watch officers. The team comprises a Sergeant and PCs who are specially trained and work alongside neighbourhood policing teams. The force works very closely with rural stakeholders and holds quarterly Rural Crime Board meetings. This provides the opportunity for the police to update representatives from across the rural community and also for those representatives to raise issues of concern. Stakeholders also contribute to the quarterly publication 'Rural Times' which is aimed at residents in rural areas and is distributed widely through the various stakeholder networks.



Member experience

Charlie Flindt, Hampshire

Charlie is the second generation to farm on the 1000 acre family farm in Hampshire. His experience reflects almost the full spectrum of rural crime, including theft, hare coursing, fly-tipping and livestock worrying. He has nothing but praise for Hampshire constabulary's Country Watch team.

'I have an excellent relationship with our local officers. They really understand the countryside'

The feedback that the team provides following a report is very much appreciated and helps to improve confidence in the police.

Training

1. Police officers

The force has put together a two day training course aimed at educating all officers on rural crime issues.

2. Call centre operators

Call centre operators are also provided with a one day version of the course to ensure that they are fully trained on the terminology and different types of rural crime.

3. Films

A series of short training films on rural crime issues have been prepared for officers to view on their smart phone on the way to a rural crime event. These provide a briefing on the specific rural crime issue to be confronted, what the offence is, what the officer can expect to find or see, what their legal powers are and what course of action may be taken. The NFU has assisted with the creation of these videos.

Operations

1. Operation Falcon

Rural crime is more seasonal than crimes in urban areas. By using detailed intelligence gathering, the force has been able to identify key crime types for different months of the year. Under the heading Operation Falcon, district commanders choose a particular issue which will be targeted during a particular month. Hare coursing is a good example of this. Intelligence shows that hare coursing is a big issue in September. Therefore for the month of September the force will concentrate a specific operation to target areas known to be vulnerable to hare coursing. The force introduced the seizure of the dogs involved in hare coursing and poaching and this has had a big impact on the incidence of these crimes. Coursers have been landed with both fines and the compensation costs of kennelling seized dogs, with forfeited dogs being rehomed.

2. Stop that Thief

Working in partnership with the NFU, this will be a county-wide project operating in each rural district. The NFU will fund intruder detection equipment, on a trial basis, to farmers who may be repeat victims or otherwise susceptible. Along with specific crime prevention advice from the police, the aim is to reduce non-dwelling burglaries and provide reassurance. At the end of the trial period there is the option to buy the equipment with the funds raised being used to purchase a new set of equipment for a another victim.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR UK GOVERNMENT

Government takes the lead to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach across all police forces areas.

The NFU has found a complete lack of a coordinated approach to rural crime in police forces across the country. This is creating huge disparities in the way that different forces deal with rural crime. A lack of coordination between neighbouring forces is leading to 'criminal tourism' where successful initiatives to combat crime in one county lead criminals to find softer targets elsewhere. Furthermore, criminals are often travelling long distances to commit crimes, and so a combined force response is required to effectively target cross-border criminals.

A coordinated and consistent approach will allow police forces to share best practice and improved communications between forces will enable a more joined up approach.

The perpetrators of rural crime often come from urban areas and may have links to international networks. The nature of farm businesses also means that they often house expensive pieces of machinery or deal with large online financial transactions. Many police strategies suggest that organised criminal networks have sophisticated strategies in place to identify and steal farm machinery to order and quickly ship it out of the country, and use extensive cyber-crime networks to prey on vulnerable farm businesses.

A coordinated approach would ensure the effective use of existing legislation, but also identify opportunities to change outdated legislation where appropriate. Such coordination is essential to avoid the current disparities in the approach to rural crime amongst police forces as well as to address the sophisticated international networks that are suspected of targeting farm businesses.

The NFU asks the UK government to form a cross-departmental rural crime task force to ensure the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and all relevant departments, including Defra and DCLG, work together with Police & Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and police to address the failures in dealing with rural crime.

There is currently no national definition of rural crime, which means that some counties have no definition and others use a variety of different definitions. Policy makers cannot get a true picture of the extent or impacts of rural crime without a consistent national definition of it.

The NFU asks government to consult with all stakeholders to agree a definition of rural crime that can be used to inform consistent policy decisions and to enable an accurate recording and target setting.

The NFU will engage our members to support government in this consultation.

Home Office consults on a funding formula that reflects the needs of rural policing

The NFU supports the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN) campaign on Fairer Funding for Rural Policing. A survey conducted by the NRCN in 2015 shows that the demands and impact of rural crime on a dispersed population put it on a par with the challenges of tackling crime amongst dense urban populations.

The current formula used to allocate government money to police forces doesn't take account of the policing needs of rural areas. The formula uses calculations based on reported crime rather than crime rates, and levels of reporting crimes are known to be low in rural areas for a number of reasons (see page 13). Many issues unique to rural areas are not taken into account when deciding the levels of government funding allocated to policing those areas, including the influx of tourists over summer and the vulnerability of isolated rural communities.

The NFU ask the Home Office to ensure fair funding for rural forces.

The current funding formula can mean that rural council tax payers fund a greater share of the costs of their local police force.

Devon and Cornwall: council tax payers pay

39%

of local force costs.

The average for England is

32%

of local force costs.

Merseyside council tax payers pay

17%

of local force costs.

If Devon and Cornwall police were funded at the average level, then the force would receive a further

£12 MILLION PER ANNUM

or another 230 police officers.

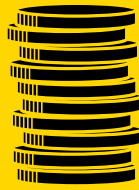
Ministry of Justice directs the Sentencing Council to ensure Magistrates' Court Sentencing Guidelines are in place for all rural crimes

The NFU is calling for an effective justice system that reflects the true costs of rural crime. NFU members have reported that they feel that many fines don't reflect the impact of the crimes and their organised nature.

The Sentencing Council *"considers the interests of victims of crime through conducting research into victims' perceptions and experiences with respect to particular offences in order to inform the development of specific sentencing guidelines"*.

The NFU calls on the Sentencing Council to review the range of rural crimes experienced by farming communities and ensure that Sentencing Guidelines reflect the true nature and impact of these crimes.

The guidelines should contain up-to-date information about the penalties that can be issues for these crimes.



Between **2004 and 2014** the maximum penalty for most wildlife crimes was a

FINE OF £5,000

with some offences also punishable by a **6 month custodial sentence**, although the actual penalties awarded by UK courts were significantly smaller.



In the same period, the Criminal Justice System successfully

PROSECUTED 2,065 INDIVIDUALS

for Night and Day Poaching.



Of those found guilty **1,864** were fined, the average fine over the ten-year period was

£227

CREDIT: Dorothea Delpech (UCL)

Increased investment in research funding to understand how rural crime links to organised crime

It is often perceived that rural crime is on an insignificant scale, perpetrated by a few individuals. However, the National Crime Agency (NCA) recognise that organised criminal groups are involved in vehicle crime, commercial robbery and wildlife crime and operate across a broad range of other criminal activities. The NCA also found that organised criminals exploit weaknesses including gaps in law enforcement and vulnerable communities. Those involved in rural crime can appear to be small scale with few assets, but may actually be part of large organised criminal networks.

The UK Government has recognised that serious and organised crime is a threat to national security and costs the UK more than **£24 billion a year**. There are suspicions that rural areas and farms become targets for organised criminal gangs.

To date there has been a lack of research into on farm and rural crime specifically, either at an academic level, by the police or the National Crime Agency. The way that crimes

have traditionally been reported has made it extremely difficult to differentiate between rural and other crimes. For example, organised criminal gangs are thought to not only steal farm machinery, but may also be involved in human trafficking and extortion. Farm businesses may be seen as a soft target by these criminal gangs.

It is also suggested that the Dark Web (online networks that can only be accessed with specific software) is increasingly linked to organised crime, and evidence of these links will allow for more police resource to be allocated towards the monitoring of online activity in order to gain evidence.

The NFU calls for more funding on research to understand the true nature of rural crime and how it could be linked to organised criminal networks. The NFU ask that the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research prioritise research on how organised crime groups are operating in rural areas in the UK.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONERS

Police & Crime Commissioners must give more priority to rural crime as a strategic objective and work together to ensure effective cross border policing

Every Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) must ensure that rural crime is recognised in police and crime objectives for their area in their police and crime plan. PCCs must ensure that rural policing is fully resourced and should engage with the rural community, including the NFU, to make sure local priorities are joined up. The NFU would welcome regular meetings with the PCC to facilitate open discussions on the issues facing farming communities.

Better cross-border communications, and combined operations, would have a more effective impact on reducing crimes. More nationally focused or cross-border police operations, as opposed to regional ones, would help prevent crime migration.

Better collaboration between police forces but also with rural and business communities is essential to combatting rural crime. Good examples of collaboration are demonstrated on page 8.

Rural communities also perceive “no go areas” for police and a lack of action against certain individuals and groups who are well known to the police as repeat offenders. It is essential that forces collaborate to deal with all offenders consistently.

Police & Crime Commissioners to work with Home Office, Ministry of Justice and police forces to facilitate a coordinated approach

To support the NFU’s push for a coordinated approach to rural crime in police forces across the country, PCCs must have a key role in bridging the gap between government, the police and other stakeholders (including Local Authorities).

The NFU believes that the NRCN can play a key role in bridging this gap, and asks that Home Office and Ministry of Justice ministers regularly engage with PCCs and stakeholders via the NRCN Executive Board.



Reduction in police presence: Between 2000 and 2012

MORE THAN 1,000

rural police stations closed, with even more on reduced opening hours (Smith, Laing & McElwee, 2013). This has directly impacted on the level of police surveillance and increased the areas that already limited officer numbers patrol (Barclay 2003).

KEY CHALLENGES FOR CHIEF CONSTABLES

Chief Constables ensure that each police force has a dedicated rural police team

NFU members have overwhelmingly raised the importance of having one point of contact with the police. A dedicated officer as a local point of contact will restore the trust of the rural community and allow for communication and feedback between the police and the community. A dedicated officer who understands rural and farm related issues, and offers a consistent point of contact will provide invaluable support to the farming community.

Improved communications between the police and rural communities

Much of the under-reporting of rural crime is due to basic difficulties with communicating with the police. Inadequacies with the 101 system have contributed to a loss of confidence within rural communities, with many people giving up on the system entirely. This is compounded by poor phone and internet coverage which leads to the sense of isolation. Furthermore, police are not fully utilising the valuable knowledge of members of the rural community as fully as they could.

Confusion with when, and when not, to call 999 and 101 exacerbates this problem. The NFU has found that farmers are often unsure whether to dial 101 or 999 and often call 101 when a police response is needed immediately or when a crime is in progress. NFU members also report that once a crime is reported they do not receive updates on progress from the police.

The NFU has found that some police forces are using different forms of communication technology, including online crime reporting (including the Self Evident app) and use of social media messaging networks (such as WhatsApp), but once again there is no consistency in the approach to modern methods of communication across constabularies.

NFU members report that using 999 and 101 systems to report a crime is often unsatisfactory. Members have reported calls not being answered, and a lack of understanding amongst control room staff on rural related issues. This means that police response can often be delayed and this contributes to the fear and intimidation which rural dwellers experience. This impacts how, or even if, rural crimes are reported and therefore the overall rural crime figures.

The NFU calls for the police to have access to modern communication technology to be able to offer a consistent and reliable system for reporting crimes and to facilitate effective cooperation with the rural community.

The NFU proposes investment and development of the 101 system to ensure it can be an effective national, single non-emergency number. An effective 101 system will allow the rural community to report all non-emergency incidents, from hare coursing to fly-tipping, and ensure the incident is dealt with appropriately.

Training for police and control room staff to raise awareness of rural and farming matters

The experience of NFU members is that officers called to an incident on farm often have no understanding of how farm businesses operate and how crimes can impact on the farming community. Often they are not equipped for the physical nature of the farm, with clothing & footwear unsuitable for muddy fields and vehicles unusable off-road.

The NFU calls for consistent training across constabularies:

- To provide an understanding of farm businesses
- To give officers an overview of the farming calendar
- To understand the impact of the various types of rural crime

This training should be an ongoing requirement, given to all officers who have anything to do with rural areas.

Forces should also share best practice on delivering the legal 'tool box' available to them to combat rural crimes.

The NFU offers to work with every police force to offer this training for officers, including visits to farms and discussions on farm with local NFU members.

The NFU calls on the police to find ways to train control room staff in farm issues. This could include more innovative training practices and materials, including explanations for keywords and pictures. This training needs to be ongoing to account for the turnover of control room staff.

A coordinated response to rural crime can begin to address many of the principal issues, but there are also specific issues with each of the range of crimes that NFU members experience. Each crime has specific impacts on individuals and farm businesses and involves different strategies to combat.

NFU members are also concerned that the way laws and regulations are designed and enforced may have unintended consequences, for example increases in landfill tax may be leading to increases in fly-tipping.

Government, Police & Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables should have a clear strategy for dealing with each crime.

FLY-TIPPING

WHAT IS FLY-TIPPING?

Fly-tipping is the illegal dumping of waste, usually on farmland. In 2015/16 there were 936,000 incidents of fly-tipping, a 4% increase since 2014/15.

THE CRIME

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence under Section 33 of the Environment Protection Act. If found guilty of such an offence, the perpetrator could face imprisonment or receive a fine or both.



NFU ASKS

- The NFU wants to see local authorities assist landowners in the reporting and clean-up or disposal of the fly-tipped material.
- The NFU wants all parties (local authorities/ Environment Agency/landowners and ultimately the police) to work together on this issue including prevention, clean up and prosecution. In some areas this relationship works well however it is vital to achieve consistency of approach across the whole country.
- The NFU calls on the Magistrates' Association to ensure its members are properly briefed about the requirements of the Environmental Offences Definitive Guidelines and make full use of their sentencing powers to provide a real deterrent against fly-tipping.
- The NFU observes that the increase in fly-tipping is due to the difficulty of legal disposal of waste across the country and the associated cost. It is rare to catch those guilty of fly-tipping; farmland lies remote, unguarded and easily accessible to this criminal activity.

IMPACTS

Waste can be costly and time consuming to remove, dangerous to human health, wildlife and livestock, and in some cases pollute watercourses and contaminate land. When incidents of fly-tipping take place on private land it is the landowner's responsibility to remove the illegally dumped waste. It should not be the sole responsibility of the landowner to deal with this crime.

Specific problems

- Inconsistency in the way local authorities, the Environment Agency and police engage with private landowners.
- Some local authorities are very helpful in their dealings with private landowners, providing advice and investigating incidents; some remove fly-tipped material for a reasonable charge; other local authorities are less engaged.
- Anecdotal reports suggest the police may sometimes regard fly-tipping as a less serious crime than others they are dealing with and there have been reports of difficulty in some areas in obtaining crime numbers.
- There are concerns regarding the number of prosecutions and level of fines being handed out by Magistrates for fly-tipping offences. Currently, the maximum sentence for fly-tipping in the Magistrates' court is an unlimited fine and/or 12 months in prison, but 95% of the sentences actually issued are fines of less than £1,000.

PREVENTING FLY-TIPPING

- Restrict access to your land by installing gates or physical barriers (strategically placed earthbunds, tree trunks, boulders etc.). Make sure that when erecting any form of barrier you are not permanently blocking a public right of way. Be aware of other land management requirements, including cross compliance.
- Make sure gates are closed and, if possible, locked when not in use.
- Improve visibility so that fly-tippers are not hidden from view. Fly-tippers prefer to commit their crimes out of sight.
- Install or improve lighting if possible.
- Consider placing appropriate deterrent signage and CCTV cameras.
- Swiftly clear any waste that is dumped to remove any encouragement for others to add to it.

REPORTING A FLY-TIPPING INCIDENT

- 1) Exercise caution. Some fly-tipped waste can be hazardous. Do not open bags or drums and be aware that piles of soil may be contaminated or hide dangerous material.
- 2) Record as many details as possible about the waste and when you found it.
- 3) Report the incident to your local authority (see www.gov.uk/report-flytipping) – do not move the waste or remove any evidence from it until the authorities have been notified. Call 999 if you witness an incident in progress. To report large scale illegal dumping and hazardous waste contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
- 4) Remember that fly-tippers are doing something illegal – they are unlikely to welcome people observing them. Do not put yourself at risk.

The NFU recommends that pressure is applied to local authorities to carry out the clear up. Once the local authority has arranged for disposal, they should:

- Use a registered waste carrier, as if it is dumped elsewhere you could be held responsible and face an unlimited fine.
 - Acquire documentation which includes the details of the waste and who is taking it away.
- If you do have to take the waste to a licensed waste site yourself:
- Make sure you are registered as a waste carrier.
 - If the waste is hazardous then make sure that it is being carried and disposed of by those licensed to deal with hazardous waste.
 - Keep full details of your clearance and disposal costs. Successful prosecution can mean that your costs incurred for the removal of the waste can also be recovered.

REMEMBER: ALWAYS REPORT A FLY-TIPPING INCIDENT.

HARE COURSING

WHAT IS HARE COURSING?

Hare coursing is the pursuit of hares with dogs, often for the purposes of betting. It takes place on areas of flat, open land where the dogs can easily and visibly pursue the hare. It is typically carried out by large groups of people who travel long distances in often stolen or unregistered cars to gain access to suitable land. The season begins as soon as the crops are harvested and trails off as the new crop emerges in the spring.

THE CRIME

Hare coursing has been illegal throughout the UK since 2005 when the Hunting Act 2004 made it an offence to hunt wild mammals with dogs. In recent years there has been a significant increase in incidences and the activity has become notably more organised with increasingly violent escalations. In Cambridgeshire alone the number of reported incidences between September 2015 and 2016 rose from 42 to 118, an increase of 181%.



IMPACTS

Aside from being a breach of the Hunting Act, hare coursing has many other impacts, several of which are criminal. Field boundaries such as fences and gates can be damaged by motor vehicles forcibly trying to gain access to land. Once in a field it is common practise to film the chase from a moving vehicle which can inflict significant damage to the field and any crops within.

Farmers who have approached hare coursers have faced threatening behaviour, which has occasionally led on to assaults. Farmers are being intimidated on their own land and this has led to a lack of reporting due to a fear of violent repercussions.

The NFU has received reports of farms in the Cambridgeshire area who have suffered arson attacks. While difficult to prove the perpetrator, farmers in the locality do not believe that it is coincidental that it is occurring in an area where hare coursing is prevalent.

Murray Graham who farms 1,200 acres in Oxfordshire has been plagued with coursers over the 2016/17 season with incidences occurring on a weekly basis. He said that the worry of meeting coursers and the threat of retribution as a consequence of any confrontation means that 'you need to be careful on your own patch – you especially don't want to lead them home'.

Furthermore this intimidation is hampering everyday life and farm activities. One Cambridgeshire farmer will no longer allow his children out on the farm alone during coursing season and says that farming is becoming increasingly inefficient as activity is now being carried out around the measures put in place to prevent hare coursers from gaining access to land.

NFU ASKS

- Improved cross border policing and sharing of intelligence between forces.
- Judicial system to implement the maximum penalty permitted for those convicted.
- Police should consider all of the legislative options available to them when dealing with coursers. These options could include crushing cars, and impounding dogs.
- Call centre operators must be trained on the correct terminology, and this training must take into account staff turnover.
- Sharing resources and best practice between forces.
- Provision of correct equipment such as suitable vehicles and footwear for rural officers to carry out their duties.

PREVENTING HARE COURSING

- Consider methods of restricting access to your land, such as blockades in entranceways, strategic ditch digging and padlocking gates.
- Ensure that you consult your local rights of way access officer for guidance where public access may be affected. Also check that any ditches or other obstacles do not affect your cross compliance requirements.
- Always report incidences no matter how minor so that the police have an accurate reflection of the extent of the issue.

REACTING TO A HARE COURSING INCIDENT

Be prepared:

- Have field grid references ready – these will ensure police can locate you quickly.
- Find out if you have a dedicated rural crime officer with a direct contact number.
- Join your local countryside watch if available to gain forewarning of coursers in the area.

CHECKLIST:

- If it is a 'live' incident always dial 999, otherwise dial 101.
- Make sure you clearly state 'hare coursing' to ensure that the incident is recorded correctly.
- Provide grid references with descriptions of specific landmarks for where you are located.
- If possible provide a description of the person including notable features, and also descriptions of any vehicles including number plates and any distinguishing features.
- Be discreet when collecting evidence. Approaching hare coursers whilst holding a camera may be inflammatory.
- Ensure that you receive and make note of your crime reference number.



REMEMBER: ALWAYS REPORT A HARE COURSING INCIDENT.

LIVESTOCK WORRYING

WHAT IS LIVESTOCK WORRYING?

Livestock worrying is a recurring issue for many farmers, particularly where grazing land is situated in close proximity to densely populated areas. Worrying involves dogs, which are not being kept under proper control, attacking or chasing livestock. In many cases these dogs will be otherwise lovable and good natured family pets which abscond from their premises in the absence of their owner.



THE CRIME

It is an offence for a dog to be out of control around livestock. Under section 1 of the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, if a dog is worrying livestock on agricultural land the owner (or person in charge of the dog if not the owner) is guilty of a criminal offence. The penalty for this offence is a fine of up to £1,000.

In recent years the number of reported incidents of livestock worrying has been increasing. Sheepwatch estimates that 15,000 sheep are killed by dogs each year.

IMPACTS

The impacts of livestock worrying are huge. The biggest impacts are on the livestock who are caused unnecessary suffering, in the form of stress, injury or death. This is an animal welfare issue. Death is not always as a result of physical attack causing injury – the stress of being chased can directly lead to death or the abortion of any lambs being carried. Livestock, particularly sheep, can suffocate or obtain crush injuries when chased into confined spaces. This was the case at West Dean in Sussex where 116 sheep died through suffocation and shock as a result of a dog attack, costing the farmer £17,000. However, the impacts to the farm business go beyond the immediate loss of livestock – years of careful stock breeding can be wiped out leading to immeasurable losses.

NFU ASKS

- Improved prosecution rates for owners whose dogs are caught livestock worrying.
- Use of the maximum fine for livestock worrying to provide a deterrent.
- Sharing of resources and best practise between police forces and authorities, for example the sign designed in a joint venture between Sussex Police, the NFU and the South Downs National Park authority.



PREVENTING LIVESTOCK WORRYING

- **Public education and awareness** is key to the prevention of livestock worrying, this should be done in partnership with multiple stakeholders. A good example of partnership is that between Sussex Police, the NFU and the South Downs National Park Authority.
- **Trail or CCTV cameras:** these are a useful tool for strategic use in areas where there are repeated livestock worrying incidents.
- **Put signs up:** the NFU has produced signs in conjunction with the Kennel Club; these can be put up around fields to encourage dog walkers to keep their dogs on leads when around livestock.
- **Find out who your local rural crime officer is:** if you have one you can potentially use them as a point of contact for future incidents.

REACTING TO A LIVESTOCK WORRYING INCIDENT

It is vital that farmers report **all** incidents, no matter how small, to the police. Reporting incidents will ensure that the police are aware of all incidents within their area and give them an appreciation of the scale of the problem.

If you happen upon a livestock worrying incident in action try to take photographs of events as they occur, if you can get a picture of the dog or owner this could help with identification at a future date.

If you witness an incident and see the person responsible getting into a vehicle note down the licence plate number and vehicle details.

Take pictures of any injuries the livestock sustain to provide as evidence.

As a last resort it may be necessary to shoot the dog in order to bring an end to the incident. There are numerous considerations to take into account before taking this course of action which are too extensive to list here. Please refer to the NFU business guide below for further information.

For more information on Livestock Worrying members can refer to the NFU business guide. Alternatively contact NFU CallFirst for a copy on 0370 845 8458

REMEMBER: ALWAYS REPORT A LIVESTOCK WORRYING INCIDENT

FLY-GRAZING

WHAT IS FLY-GRAZING?

Fly-grazing is the practice of grazing horses on land without the permission of the landowner or occupier. Criminal damage is often carried out to gain access to grazing land, and the practice is often associated with poor horse welfare.

THE LEGISLATION

The main pieces of legislation relating to fly-grazing are the Animals Act 1971 as amended by the Control of Horses Act 2015 in England, and the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014 in Wales. Where the horses are in poor condition there may be offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.



IMPACTS

When a horse is left on land, the owner or occupier may become legally responsible for its welfare, which includes feeding and caring for it and ensuring its safety and security. In practical terms, this could mean spending time and money on securing fencing, ensuring an adequate supply of food and water, as well as paying for any veterinary services.

In many cases criminal damage will be carried out in order to gain access to land. Once on the land, horses can cause damage to the field, and restrict grazing available for livestock.

A number of serious and fatal road collisions have happened as a result of straying horses which have escaped from their tether.

It is not straightforward to remove a horse from land for the following reasons:

- You cannot return the horse unless you know the owner and they are willing to have it back.
- You cannot sell the horse without a valid horse passport.
- Charities often cannot take horses as they are already overrun with abandoned horses.

NFU ASKS

- A multi-agency approach involving police forces and local authorities, such as that taken by Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police.
- Consistent policing of all communities, particularly where they are already known to police.
- Police and authorities to make full use of the 'Control of Horses' legislation. This has been shown to be highly effective where used to its full effect.
- A robust and enforceable system for equine identification and traceability.

PREVENTING FLY-GRAZING

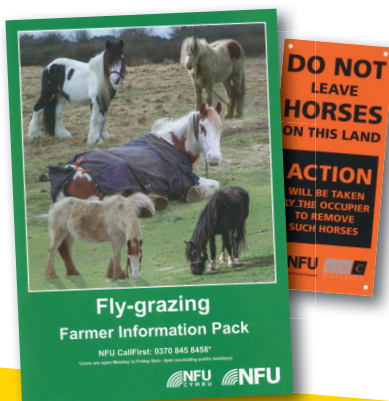
- Limit access to land: Blocking field entrances or digging strategic ditching will make land less attractive, but be aware of blocking public rights of way or other land management requirements, including cross compliance.
- Display notices: Make it clear that fly-grazing will be dealt with. Fly-grazers will usually avoid land where they know robust action will be taken. The NFU has produced such notices for its members.
- Empty or disconnect water troughs: Do not do this if the horse is already on the land as you may be causing welfare issues.
- Focus on the fields most at risk: Pasture will be more attractive than ploughed land. Consider using CCTV where there is a recurring problem.
- Check your insurance: Some insurers provide cover for the costs associated with a fly grazing incident.

REACTING TO A FLY-GRAZING INCIDENT

In the first instance, NFU members can contact an NFU CallFirst specialist adviser who will provide initial advice on your legal position and outline the options available to you.

It is important that you carry out the procedure for removing horses correctly. The most advisable course of action will be to employ a specialist horse bailiff who will carry out the procedure for you, reducing the risk of confrontation or retaliation from the horse's owner. The cost of removal is significant, and for this reason the NFU offers a member discount with one of the leading bailiff companies.

The procedure for removing a horse from your land yourself is too extensive to list here, but further information can be found in the NFU Fly-grazing Farmer Information Pack referred to below.



For more information on Fly-grazing, members can refer to the NFU Fly-grazing Farmer Information Pack. Contact NFU CallFirst for a copy on 0370 845 8458.

REMEMBER: ALWAYS REPORT A FLY-GRAZING INCIDENT

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