

## **Policing farm crime in England and Wales**

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### **Abstract**

Farm crime is a relatively neglected area of research in the criminological literature. Some work has been conducted in the United States and Australia, however, little attention has been paid to the subject in the United Kingdom. There have however, been recent concerns voiced about farm crime in England and Wales from both the public and private service sector as well as across the media. This article has two main aims: one, to ascertain why farm crime has recently emerged as a rural crime issue, when up until now it has been relatively neglected by a broader rural crime and governance framework and two, to consider how the policing of farm crime can expect to fare in the future. The paper begins with a brief review of the existing farm crime literature before situating its neglect in the United Kingdom within a broader rural crime and governance framework. Thereafter, the main focus moves onto the policing of farm crime both in its current state and within the context of recent policy developments in crime governance.

**Key Words:** Farm crime, rural policing, crime governance, big society

### **Introduction**

...the cold, hard truth is our rural regions have become hotspots of criminal activity in their own right, not just with an increase in those crimes seen in urban areas but also an entirely new breed of activity targeting farmers and their assets, both man-made and natural (Crompton<sup>1</sup> 2011a:14).

In recent times concerns have been voiced about farm crime and rural crime more broadly in England and Wales from both the public and private service sector as well as across the media. In November 2011, the

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Crompton, the then Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police was also the ACPO lead for wildlife and rural crime.

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) together with Crimestoppers, held the inaugural rural crime seminar 'Closing the Gate on Rural Crime'. This event brought together criminal justice professionals, members of the farming community and other interested parties concerned about rural crime issues. The aim was to encourage more widespread use of existing crime prevention strategies and to develop new ideas on preventing and detecting rural crime. The organised theft of livestock and large agricultural machinery, according to the raft of recent media reports and voiced concerns by interested parties, appears to be a particular problem. A report in the *Farmer's Guardian* (Midgley, 2012a) for example, citing the latest National Farmers Union<sup>2</sup> (NFU) Mutual statistics highlighted the cost to the agricultural industry of rural theft last year amounting to £52.7 million with agri-crime climbing 6 percent in England and Wales. Other media reports have referred to increasing thefts of large and expensive equipment by organised gangs, with tractors turning up in both European and less developed countries (BBC Countryfile, 2011). The BBC's *Countryfile* programme, watched by between six and nine million viewers every Sunday (Case, 2012) has sporadically reported on agricultural crime costing the industry millions of pounds. In 2010, it cited 600 tractors worth £25 million stolen that year along with 1,700 quad bikes.

In the academic arena, farm crime is a relatively neglected area of research in the criminological literature, with some work undertaken in the United States and in Australia and relatively little in comparison emanating from the United Kingdom. Farm victimisation however, does need to be regarded as an important aspect of rural crime and requires further attention from academics as well as from rural policymakers and practitioners. When farmers find themselves a victim of crime, the financial costs can reverberate beyond the individual business into the community and ultimately, consumers may find themselves paying higher prices for agricultural products (Chalfin et al., 2007). The theft of livestock can mean that years of hard work is effectively wiped out where farmers have invested time and money into breeding stocks and built up blood lines (Barclay, 2001). Insurance premiums can increase and there are potential risks to the food chain where stolen livestock is slaughtered and distributed illegally (Jones, 2010b). On this latter point, the animal welfare issues associated with such practices also warrant attention (Jones, 2012a).

The aims of this article are twofold: first, to ascertain why farm crime has recently emerged as a particular problem, when up until now it has been relegated in the list of targeted crime priorities by a broader rural crime and governance framework; and second, to consider a range of issues related to existing and future 'policing' responses. In policing farm crime, both formal and informal networks are important resources in addressing crime and crime prevention issues. Formal policing requires the 'eyes and ears' of those on the ground to report crime and/or suspicious activities. In

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<sup>2</sup> The NFU Mutual conducts an annual rural crime survey based on actual claims data from their 324 agency branch networks across the UK (NFU 2011).

turn, rural communities should be able to expect a timely response to concerns that may arise.

Before investigating the two main questions further, the paper begins with a review of the existing farm crime literature. Thereafter, a brief discussion follows on the rural crime governance and policing framework to locate the existing relative neglect of farm crime in the United Kingdom before honing in on the main focus of the paper, the ‘policing’ of farm crime. The paper puts forward the case that recent concerns about agricultural crime are no doubt encouraged by the likely impact of emerging political and economic policies on the already ‘thin green line’. Following in this vein and before drawing to a close, the article considers the impact that changes related to the *Big Society’s* law and order agenda may have on farm crime and rural communities.

### **Existing knowledge on farm crime**

From a contemporary perspective, the issue of farm crime has failed to attract an in-depth and sustained response from academics and the work that has been conducted can be broadly separated into ‘two waves’ (Donnermeyer et al., 2011:193). The first wave took place up to the mid-1990s in the United States and focused on farm victimisation (Dunkelberger et al., 1992; Farmer and Voth, 1989; Peale, 1990; Deeds et al., 1992; Donnermeyer, 1987; Cleland, 1990 and Bean and Lawrence, 1978). The second wave gathered some pace in the work of a few academics from around the end of the twentieth century into the first decade of the twenty first century. This second wave differed in that it developed from a wider international base drawing in both Australian (Carcach, 2002; Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2002; 2005; 2007) and British studies (Sugden, 1999; George Street Research, 1999), alongside work conducted in the US (Chalfin et al., 2007; Mears et al., 2007). In the context of the United Kingdom, a Scottish study (George Street Research, 1999:1) revealed that ‘a significant minority are affected by farm crime and an English study (Sugden 1999:30) highlighted that farming was ‘under considerable threat from crime’. Sugden’s (1999) study was undertaken in response to increasing reports of farm crime during the mid-1990s, wherein the cost of farm theft was cited as £14 million per year (Hornsby 1995). Sugden’s comprehensive crime and security survey of farm holdings led him to report that having a clearer idea of the problem ‘is the first step to doing something about it’ (p.36).

At an international level, Donnermeyer et al. (2011) defined two broad categories of ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ crimes taking place on farms:

... ‘ordinary crimes’: ...such as the theft of livestock, machinery and farm supplies, vandalism, rubbish dumping, and damage from trespassers and hunters ... ‘extraordinary’ for their potential

impacts...organised drug production, such as marijuana and methamphetamines... (p. 193).

To date, it is the 'ordinary' crimes and attendant victimisation that have attracted much of the academic and media attention, along with targeted crime prevention strategies. Two broad comparative trends can be drawn from the existing international literature in the 'ordinary' crimes category. First, that rates of victimisation are fairly similar across the main types of crime committed (property-related theft, vandalism and burglary) and second, that some similarities can be drawn in terms of patterns of victimisation and the geographical location of the agricultural holding (Donnermeyer et al., 2011). Four further comparative sub-trends are also indicated:

- one, if a farm is situated in closer proximity to main routes and/or urban centres then this results in an increased likelihood of becoming a victim of crime (Barclay and Donnermeyer 2007; Mears et al., 2007);
- two, those holdings storing equipment and machinery at isolated locations some distance from the main operations experienced higher rates of theft;
- three, farms that were situated near a public road but still relatively remote from urban settlements were more likely to experience trespassing, vandalism and fly-tipping (Donnermeyer et al., 2011); and
- four, farms encompassing difficult terrain (vegetation and mountainous areas) were most likely to meet with trespassing, poaching and livestock theft (Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2002).

These findings resonate with explanations of crime situated in the environmental crime literature (Bottoms and Wiles, 1997), in particular, the theories of guardianship, accessibility and opportunity (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Clarke, 1995). The varying relationship between crime rates, levels of guardianship and accessibility in the agricultural context gives rise to a number of issues in relation to employing a range of crime prevention strategies. However, there is not always a straightforward implementation. Indeed, Jones (2008) found in her own research into farm crime in North Wales that informal guardianship was heavily reliant on building up reciprocal relationships with neighbours based on local knowledge. In the face of migration patterns, and changes to farm owner/occupier status, the formation of relationships sometimes proved challenging or unwelcome and this had implications for informal policing and surveillance.

In 2002, Aust and Simmons reported that rural areas were vulnerable to crime due to their relative isolation. Further, they noted that longer police response times were inherent due to this environment. This was a fact also reported in the Scottish farm crime survey (George Street Research Limited 1999), which highlighted that the policing of such widespread and isolated areas was an issue for the management and

allocation of resources. It seems then, that building on and developing already established informal networks in the agricultural community would be a move towards a more productive and sustainable strategy regarding crime prevention measures, as it would be reliant on members of the community already 'in situ', rather than on an increasingly stretched formal police response. Issues of formal and informal policing resources in tackling farm crime will be discussed more fully later in the paper. At this point it would be useful to precede these discussions with a brief overview of the neglected status of farm crime by rural governance frameworks to date, in order to later question how continued and increasing budgetary constraints will impact existing issues and newer developments in the commission of farm crime in the future.

### **Rural crime governance and policing: the relegation of farm crime issues**

Apart from the work of Cain (1973), very little focus has been given to rural policing from criminologists (Mawby and Yarwood, 2011) and '...studies of rural policing have fallen off the edge of many research agendas' (*ibid*:1). When Cain discussed the issue she talked about the distinctiveness of rural policing, about its isolating and lonesome nature, and a dependence on one's neighbours and community within which the police lived. In contemporary times rural crime issues are policed at a number of levels which is quite different to Cain's findings in her key study 40 years ago.

Today, rural policing can be understood within the new crime governance agenda whereby 'order' and 'safety' are 'co-produced' in partnership with other state agencies, organisations and communities (Gilling, 2011:70). Such moves can be seen to have emerged against a backdrop of disillusionment with rising crime figures in the post-war era and the perceived failure of government to address the crime problem. The neo-liberal agenda advocates a changing relationship between the individual and the state, whereby a 'responsibilisation' ethos is pinned on both the individual and the community (Garland, 1996). The impact on national and local law and order policymaking resulted in the restructuring of the police force in England and Wales. There was a move towards reactive policing and many local police stations were closed. Such change heralded the partnership working now evident in contemporary policing and governance at various levels and cemented by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Crawford, 1997). This 'streamlining' of public services was particularly felt by those in rural areas as crime rates were rising in supposedly 'crime free' areas and policing was becoming less visible (Jones, 2008).

The 1990s saw the emergence of local policing schemes, encouraged by the political reasoning of active citizenship (Fyfe, 1995). Against this emphasis on volunteerism and community engagement Neighbourhood Watch (NW) schemes emerged with varying success. Such schemes may

appear conducive to support what are believed to be close knit rural communities (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995), however, the British Crime Survey reported that agricultural areas were not necessarily receptive environments (Hussain, 1988) as within a restructured countryside local networks had dissipated (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). In recent times, similar schemes like Farm Watch (FW) have been implemented across rural areas, their success in large part attributed to local police and partnership initiatives in supporting and maintaining their establishment, as will be discussed later. By the end of the decade, partnership working had a firm hold in government policy. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out 376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), across England and Wales - known as Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) initially in Wales and later adopted in England - at borough or district level. Active citizenship and notions of responsabilisation were now formalised within the Act. Accountability was more clearly defined at the local level as communities were expected to look for their own solutions to address crime and policing issues (Yarwood, 2011).

At the outset the CSPs were made up of police and local authorities, however this was soon broadened out to include other 'responsible authorities' - fire authorities and primary care trusts - and local bodies (Gilling, 2011:71). One of the first tasks of this new 'joined up' partnership approach was to implement crime audits on a triennial basis in order to set future crime reduction policies (Crawford, 1998). More recent developments have seen CSPs evolve, whereby there is a requirement following the 2006 Police and Justice Act for regular 'strategic assessments' drawing on the National Intelligence Model (NIM) that underpins the business model for local policing. This has seen an annually updated three-year rolling plan set in place. For rural areas, strategic decision making has moved to county level Local Area Agreements (LAA) within Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Thus whilst CSPs continue within district councils, the strategic decision making has been re-located in the LAA. CSPs are about delivery and LSPs about strategy (Improvement and Development Agency, 2011).

Changes in rural crime governance have been paralleled by an increased emphasis on risk-based discourses (Garland, 1996). This has manifest in a plethora of risk-based strategies around identifying and policing 'hot-spots' of crime from national to local levels. The Government's web of crime control pushes the language of benchmarking, targets and performance indicators from centre to periphery, within which the LSPs and CSPs find themselves tangled to reproduce national priorities. The police have also been ensnared within this new culture of control as the expectation is that local police boundaries are more closely aligned with local authority boundaries and tighter liaisons are drawn up with partners through the CSPs and LSPs. The order of the day has been a national programme of neighbourhood policing, an engagement with citizens and a new tier of police community support officers (PCSOs). However, the NIM has engendered intelligence-led policing (Maguire and John, 2006), where

priorities are determined by an objective analysis of crime problems. In this context, local people's perceptions of their crime problems may be viewed as a lesser priority (Ratcliffe, 2008), despite calls for greater local accountability.

The recent developments in national crime governance and policing have by default negated rural crime (Gilling, 2011). This is because the new risk-based strategies preclude many rural crime issues from meeting the nationally defined 'crime problem' benchmark. Until relatively recently responding to 'headline' crime occurring in more populous areas has been held as the priority in performance terms (Gilling, 2007). This argument harks back to ideas about the urban-rural dichotomy, where urban crime figures come out on top and attract much of the available resources. Urban dominance is also visible in broader rural contexts. As already discussed, the 43 Police Force Areas are defined along a continuum of most rural to most urban based on population density. Within the most rural, urban areas do exist and these attract the bulk of available funding. Mawby (2007) for example, in a study of rural Cornwall found that market towns registered as hot-spots as compared to the more remote areas. Such strategies are not without consequences: '...rural concerns that do not figure on central government's radar are effectively marginalised and thus not addressed' (Gilling, 2011:73). Farm crime, until relatively recently, has not made 'headline' crime news. This is hardly surprising, given the central steer of crime control and prevention strategies and priorities. Indeed, when farm crime has appeared on the policing agenda it has been short lived. To date, there is a lack of 'reliable' comparable data to aid an understanding of the true extent of the problem, beyond the sporadic bits of information gleaned from newspaper reports and farm insurance data.

### **Policing farm crime: Measuring the extent of farm crime**

Livestock rustling continues to blight farming operations all over the UK, with figures from rural insurer NFU Mutual showing the cost of thefts across the UK increased by 170 per cent in 2011 over 2010. More than 67,000 sheep were stolen in the UK in 2011, costing farmers in the region of £6m (Midgley 2012b).

The extent of farm crime is difficult to ascertain in any 'real' sense. In an exploratory paper by Jones (2010) inherent inconsistencies were identified in the system of recording incidents of farm crime within the four Welsh Police Force Areas (PFAs), thus making it difficult to draw comparative data at a regional level. Following this up in a national study of the recording of police crime in England and Wales, Jones (2011) similarly concluded that a uniform approach to recording farm crime was lacking in the systems within and across PFAs. These findings taken together, exemplify the extant lack of useful, official data on farm crime, making it difficult to draw comparative trends both spatially and temporally to

effectively combat the issue through implementation of targeted crime prevention strategies.

Apart from the recorded crime statistics, agricultural crime figures are annually released by the NFU Mutual (NFU Mutual, 2012). These allow for some spatial and temporal trends to be identified, although not for the mapping of actual levels of crime (Coombes et al., 1994). This data is largely for theft with discrepancies inherent in the system such as false and inflated claims or non-reporting. The information available is based on claims experiences collated by branch networks and is thereby limited to NFU policyholders (Jones, 2010b). The 2011 survey, for example, targeted 324 branch network agents and received 272 replies (NFU 2011). In sum, the insurance statistics are limited, but nevertheless, their annual survey results and press releases have continued to attract the attention of the press and the police at an intermittent level that can be paralleled with the sporadic attention on rural crime issues generally; for example, from the *Daily Post*: 'Shocking new NFU Mutual figures show a 30% jump in the rural crime rate in Wales, with insurance claims up from £1.7m in 2010 to £2.3m last year' (Forgrave, 2012).

The generation of 'real time' data of farm crime and the systematic coding for specific agricultural crimes has similarly been identified as an important precursor to tackling farm crime in the United States. In a process and outcome evaluation of an agricultural crime initiative, Mears et al. (2007) identified five activities necessary for the prevention and reduction of agricultural crime: the first one being the collection and analysis of farm crime data, followed by information sharing, education about the issues, marking equipment and promoting an aggressive stance towards enforcement prosecution. Indeed, the sharing of information is an important activity in order to raise awareness of farm crime incidents occurring in particular areas, alerting both the potential victims and the police.

## **Funding and resources**

Even though the sharing of information on farm crime with relevant bodies is clearly important, Jones (2011) concluded that no nationally identifiable point of contact for dealing with farm crime issues across PFAs existed. Many PFAs utilised different job descriptors for a comparable role; from a 'rural safety officer/partnership co-ordinator' and a 'policy inspector' to a 'deputy force crime and incident registrar' (Jones, 2011:28). This made it difficult to identify a similar point of contact and thus share information. In recent times, some PFAs have implemented an identifiable point of contact for wildlife and/or rural crime, where previously this may have been lacking, but this is by no means a standardised descriptor. Dyfed-Powys Police, for example, have seconded a 'rural champion' officer to the Countryside Council of Wales. This role requires the officer to drive around



the countryside looking for rural and wildlife crime (Gwlad Online, undated).

Of note, is the fact that such posts are underpinned by variable funding priorities and periodic policing strategies, and are thus transitory, as is exemplified in the analysis that follows a case in the North Wales PFA. Bodden (2003), reported on farmers being furious over the axing of a countryside police officer, a post superseded by community beat managers who were encouraged to strengthen their links with farming communities. In 2007, a farming communities' officer was established, apparently following pressure from the Welsh farming unions and a perceived increase in rural crime in the region (Gwlad, 2006). By February 2008, the post had again been axed and fears were raised about the lack of police response to a rural crime wave targeting farms in the area (Abbott, 2008). Such a visible withdrawal in police personnel provided interesting reading for local people in the farming pages as the reports fed into existing concerns about the changing nature of policing in rural areas. Furthermore, perceptions of poor policing responses were said to manifest in a lack of confidence in reporting farm crime. At face value, the balance of the reciprocal relationship between formal and informal policing networks was effectively being tipped. Local people believed that the police also needed to be proactively engaged with the farming community (Jones, 2008).

Such toing and froing of the post during the five year period can be located in a broader rural policing agenda. During 2001 to 2006 the Rural Policing Fund (RPF) with a budget of £30 million came into existence, with the aim of making rural policing more visible and accessible (Aust and Simmons, 2002). The criterion set for funding applicants was that the individual PFA needed to '...demonstrate real improvements in the policing of rural areas' (DETR/MAFF, 2000:43). By 2006, in the wake of the introduction of local policing teams, the RPF was merged with three other funding streams. Whilst the government emphasised that within this new framework the level of rural funding would continue (Hansard, 2006), in real terms policing in rural areas was already being challenged by a performance culture (Yarwood, 2008). This meant that resources were largely focused on high crime hotspots to achieve visible results (Gilling, 2011) at the expense of rural policing and in particular the policing of farm crime.

### **The cost of victimisation**

The concern shown by NFU Mutual in farm crime issues is understandable, given that they have a vested interest in promoting the implementation of crime prevention strategies. As an insurance company, it is in their best interests to minimise the losses incurred by their policyholders. However, not all farmers insure their property as many are complacent about becoming a victim of crime (Jones, 2008; 2011; Jones and Holmes, 2013 forthcoming). Insured or not, the impact of agricultural crime victimisation

on individual farmers and their families is immense because a single act of theft can mean the loss of years of investment and hard work. The loss can also be felt more widely in the local economy served by farmers. Additionally, there are issues related to the illegal slaughter of animals and the health risks associated with the subsequent disposal of carcasses destined for the food chain (Jones 2010b). Agricultural crime is thus expensive and its impact should also be considered in the wider context regarding escalating food and insurance prices (Carcach, 2002). This is a particularly pertinent issue in recent times as the UK experiences a continuing recession. The latest press release from the NFU Mutual (2012) cites 'poor economic conditions and rising commodity prices' as fuelling the current upsurge in rural crime. This is a position reflected in the recent ACPO inaugural rural crime seminar where Mr Crompton (2011a), drawing on NFU figures posited:

Whether it is the tough economic times forcing more people to turn to a life of crime or the relatively lax security of some farms that make them an easy target for thieves, it is clear this has become a major concern in recent years and continued action is required (p.14).

Beyond the idyll smoke screen, rural areas are being viewed as an ever increasing target for criminals, with rich pickings on offer in an accessible and discrete environment (Jones, 2012b). Complacency on the part of rural dwellers is contributing to the relative ease with which criminals are able to locate and steal agricultural machinery, tools, vehicles and livestock. In times of recession, the countryside's 'hot-products' are being targeted by criminal gangs with high prices being fetched for diesel, oil, scrap metal and livestock. The price, for example, of lamb chops has increased from 1149p/kg in June 2008 to 1375p/Kg in June 2012 (NFU Mutual, 2012), thus making it a viable commodity for sale on the black market.

### **Existing and burgeoning farm crime issues**

Policing within the rural context offers very specific and unique challenges. The sheer distances involved and the isolated nature of many communities can lead to a sense of vulnerability and heightened fear of crime (Crompton 2011b:2).

Similar challenges remain for the policing of farm crime across widespread areas as do those of trying to ascertain the 'true' extent of farm crime. Added to this, in recent times the media reporting of agricultural crime seems to have gathered pace as well as the implementation of a whole raft of crime prevention initiatives and calls for community involvement. Around the time of the inaugural rural crime seminar in 2011 issues of

farm crime dominated the rural crime agenda and it seemed as if its former relegation was being challenged. Discussions on the subject took place on the radio (BBC Radio 4, 2011) and articles were published in various professional journals (Police Professional, 2011) magazines such as the *Farmers Guardian* (Midgley 2012a; 2012b; 2012c) and in the national press (Daily Telegraph, 2011) commenting on concerns about organised crime occurring in the countryside. Farm crime was being reported as an increasingly organised activity with criminals willing to travel across widespread areas to commit offences. The police reported an: ‘...increasing sophistication of organised gangs making huge profits from stealing farm tractors and equipment’ (Crompton 2011b:2). In the wake of a huge increase in the theft of large and expensive machinery - including agricultural machinery stolen to order and turning up in countries like Greece, Turkey, Iran and Cyprus - the National Plant Intelligence Unit (PANIU) was established in 2008. This unit is situated within the Stolen Vehicle Unit of the Metropolitan Police, with funding from the insurance industry, and works with constabularies on a nationwide basis. The website of PANIU states: ‘...many of the criminal groups involved have international links... It has been shown to fund organised crime including the importation of large volumes of Class A drugs’ (Metropolitan Police, 2010).

The police in England and Wales have continued to develop and implement a range of initiatives to tackle farm crime and rural crime more broadly, drawing on both the regular and volunteer arms (Specials) of the Service. For example, Norfolk Constabulary, following Hertfordshire Constabulary’s lead in 2009, introduced a ‘Specials on Horseback’ Scheme in April 2012 (BBC, 2012). Indeed, at the time of writing this article, the second rural crime seminar titled ‘Rural Crime – Rounding up the Criminals’ is in the process of being organised for late 2012 led by Stuart Hyde, the Chief Constable of Cumbria Constabulary and the newly appointed ACPO lead for Wildlife and Rural Crime. A DVD ‘Shutting the Gate on Rural Crime’ was produced involving five police forces in the South East of the country (Sussex Police, 2011) and one farmer painted his 250 flock of sheep orange during the same year to prevent rustling (Daily Telegraph, 2011).

One of the key initiatives promulgated by the police to tackle farm crime is the use of Farm Watch (FW) schemes. These have developed in recent times drawing on advancements in technology. The Online Watch Link (OWL), an interactive system of two way communication between police and communities allows for messages to be sent by telephone, fax, email or mobile phone. Particularly encouraged is the use of e mail communications which offers a cost effective service for both the community and the Police and in Wales three of the four Welsh PFAs have signed up to the scheme (Gwlad, 2011). The promotion of the scheme, incorporating FW, was particularly visible at the Anglesey County Agricultural Show during August 2012, where PCSOs were actively engaging with the farming community. This reliance on police management

was also identified as a motivating factor for the sustainability of Neighbourhood Watch (NW) (Weaver, 1986). Schemes like OWL need publicising and implementing and the databases need constant updating. Moves to rationalise police resources even further by encouraging the use of on-line messaging and communications may make for a cheaper alternative, but for many living in rural communities confidence may be placed on more traditional methods of communication rather than accessing the 'new' technologies. Rationalising existing schemes may also mean that communities perceivably become more worried about perceived crime problems that appear to be on the increase. For instance, from the *Daily Post*: 'Just as we're hearing about a huge surge in rural crime, Farm Watch is being shunted into another scheme...it will be a big blow to the 200 or so farmers who rely on Farm Watch text messages in Denbighshire' (Forgrave, 2012:1).

There are also technology issues in remote rural areas where broadband technology has not been developed to its full potential and 3G signals may be out of reach for emails. The involvement of local communities in crime prevention strategies is not new, and schemes can be understood as part of a widening network developing from the introduction of NW and ideas about responsible citizenship. Such 'watch' schemes require voluntary participation and there has been much debate about the growth of NW since its inception around the rolling back of state responsibility to police civil society (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). This could similarly be said about the seeming vigour given to the re-emergent discussions on farm crime in the wake of what appears to be an increase in incidents - the reality being that much emphasis is being further laid on community involvement and active citizenship as the state rolls back even further its governmental responsibilities by visibly clawing back its resources:

A major consultation document published yesterday sets out how the force proposes to adapt to an expected £22.6m (20%) cut in its funding over the next four years. The figures make grim reading not only for officers and staff, but also the public - who the force admits will suffer from a reduced service. Around 230 out of the region's 1,600 uniformed officers could be culled, says the document, released by North Wales Police Authority (Hickey, 2010:6).

### **Future directions for the 'policing' of farm crime**

In recent times following the responsabilisation agenda communities are expected to be active citizens. The CSPs have formalised this approach and a range of partners have been encouraged towards 'joined-up' thinking and working. With regards to the theft of large agricultural machinery, the manufacturers have been brought into the picture and a raft of security measures have developed. The PANIU (2012) report that police forces

across England and Wales have 'stepped up' in the fight against rural crime and a range of targeted operations have been initialised, although further research here would be useful. Spring 2012 saw a number of police forces working with farming communities through local conferences and attending farmers meetings in the strive to develop partnerships. PANIU also reported that tractor theft had been reduced by 47% which was the lowest for 4 years as 'Police have been engaging with the rural community as never before' (2012:5). Again, further research within rural communities is needed on the effectiveness of such police engagement, which currently is a claim made by the police themselves and clearly acts to reinforce and sustain the existing relationship between the insurers and the police.

Whilst there certainly appears to be a focused effort on the targeting of large agricultural machinery, the drivers for this are the insurance companies as exemplified by their funding and partnership with PANIU. What does not seem to have altered is the relative neglect of police responses to farm crime issues more generally as evident by the longstanding issues. Policing rural areas is challenging due to the geographical landscape and reliance on guardianship as the main method of crime prevention. As such, it may be more sustainable within local farming networks. However, tipping the balance of 'policing' even further towards local communities as guardians may well engender further complacency about the reality of tackling crime and needs to be carefully handled by the police. One respondent reported - during recent research into farm crime by the authors (awaiting publication) - that he just accepted the theft of his equipment as a consequence of living in relative isolation and did not expect the police to be able to remedy the situation. This of course raises further questions about confidence in formal policing against a backdrop of the budgetary cuts, diminishing resources, Big Society responsibilities on citizens and the introduction of elected Police and Crime Commissioners in November 2012 (of more later).

Your police need you! Charlotte Smith hears how volunteers could help tackle rural crime (BBC Radio 4, 2011).

It remains to be seen if more volunteers and (even) less formal policing will solve the existing issues of farm crime. Some of the more recent schemes such as Specials on Horseback and Farm Watch co-ordination do draw on personnel resources outside of the regular force (Specials and PCSOs), thus requiring a lesser share of the public purse. They perhaps present a visible and economically viable response on behalf of CSPs, but how effective and long-term this will be in engaging the community in tackling farm crime remains to be seen. Indeed, the underlying issues have not been solved regarding a lack of knowledge on the extent of the problem. This makes it difficult to draw comparative analysis and thus evaluation in statistical terms, although the *Farmers Guardian* (Midgley 2012b) report that their investigation reveals the rural crime picture: 'Across the board, rural crime is on the increase as police

fight a never ending battle to stop thieves in their tracks". This call for a more coherent picture of rural crime was also reiterated by Tim Farron the MP for South Lakes who was quoted as saying: 'I am calling for detailed statistics on rural crime to be published, to make sure we can monitor this concerning increase' (Midgley 2012c). As already discussed a statistical analysis is an important first step towards tackling crime, but it is just one dimension towards understanding the issues concerning farm crime and rural crime more broadly. For instance, for farm crime other considerations include the ability to share up-to-date information and to look at local understandings of the 'crime problem', experiences and responses (Jones, 2010a; Gilling, 2011) in order to comprehend the nature, impact and costs of crime on farm businesses (Jones and Holmes, forthcoming 2013).

Another dimension added to the local agenda in November 2012 was the demise of police authorities, replaced by directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). The NFU Cymru (Wales) President, Ed Bailey has commented that the election of the new PCCs was an opportunity for voicing the 'rising problem of rural crime' (NFU Cymru, 2012). Mr Bailey urged rural communities to seek promises from potential candidates about their plans to tackle rural crime and NFU Cymru drew up their own manifesto for sending to candidates. It will be interesting to follow these developments and assess the impact of such change in terms of rural governance.

Looking forward in terms of balancing formal and informal policing measures, one might encourage the new PCCs to evaluate the current mix of 'policing' in their own rural jurisdictions. They need to assess and develop the particular (and likely unique) demographic and environmental factors of their PFA. Multilateral policing has expanded over the last two decades across the United Kingdom, but this has by no means been a uniform process across the country. For example, the use of private policing has figured less in rural areas against the use of more formalised public volunteering (NW Schemes; FW Schemes and the Special Constabulary) and police ancillaries (Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Neighbourhood Wardens) (Mawby, 2011). It needs to be made clear to local communities that they are not being left 'to get on with things' themselves and that they do not need to 'turn a blind eye' to crime and victimisation because there is no-one to solve it. Rather, more traditional methods of policing are no longer sustainable and new forms of policing can be perhaps even more effective. Multilateral policing models specific to PFAs need to be shaped according to community needs, and here perceptions are similarly important for instilling confidence in policing methods. An effective partnership should take on board the concerns of rural residents and act positively upon these concerns to help instil confidence that crime can be addressed through participation with multilateral policing methods. Furthermore, communities need to be convinced that whilst 'policing' may consist of many 'new' layers, each one is just as serious about combating crime as the once regular force and, in fact, may be better placed to do so through a more intensive and rapidly

responsive network. The OWL initiative already discussed is illustrative of this reasoning, although further research on its effectiveness is warranted.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that, to date, in terms of tackling rural crime, farm crime has featured on the bottom rungs of the ladder when it comes to constructing 'crime problems' and instigating attendant responses. Farm crime has intermittently appeared and disappeared across the media and agricultural crime prevention strategies at the local level have had to vie with both urban and rural 'hotspots' for limited police and local government resources. Indeed, in 2008 one of the authors (Jones) found herself confronted with a local councillor's tongue-in-cheek response whereby he feigned tears at the 'plight of poor farmers' when the issue was raised at a partnership committee meeting. The current position of farm crime however, seems to have taken on a different footing in the concerns being voiced by both the police and those with an interest in agricultural crime. In 2011 the idea of rustling a few sheep not being seen as representative of 'real crime' has been overtaken by discussions of 'serious organised crime' (Crompton, 2011:14).

In trying to understand what appears to be a gathering pace of newspaper reports and broadcast programmes on farm crime in recent times, the ACPO focus on engaging communities further to police farm crime and the credence given to the readily available insurance data - with its inherent limitations - attention needs to be drawn to the political context. In the face of further cuts to government spending and already scarce resources farm crime provides a good example where Big Society ideas can be promoted. As already discussed, in isolated areas guardianship at the local level is an important crime prevention strategy and engaging communities and volunteer networks further under the guidance of local policing makes for a cost effective public service.

Currently, it is difficult to assess what the impact will be of the Big Society agenda and the introduction of PCCs on broader rural crime issues and farm crime in particular. Agricultural crime, which has up until now been placed on the periphery of concerns about crime and subsequent constructions of the 'crime problem' has longstanding issues. Addressing these, by the very nature of the rural environment does not make for easy policing. There have been a plethora of recently implemented crime prevention strategies aimed at tackling rural crime and agricultural crime and moves to further engage farming communities. The sustainability of such measures will require constant managing in order that initiatives do not fall by the wayside, as has happened in the past when funding dries up. There may be plans afoot for local people to deliver local services, but this requires a sustained effort on the part of local governance and policing as well as local communities so that the balance does not tip too far and local communities feel they are being asked to police themselves. Rather,

drawing on multi-lateral policing models according to need may be the way forward in developing sustainable partnerships with rural communities, but confidence in these plural policing responses needs to be developed within communities. In the wake of an apparent increase in farm crime, a continuing recession and diminishing public service resources farm crime needs to be taken seriously. More work needs to be done on understanding the extent of the problem as well as allaying the fears of local communities when implementing crime prevention schemes with a limited resource base. In particular, there are also potential risks in the selling on of adulterated meat where stock has been slaughtered illegally and ends up on the black market. Farm victimisation needs to be taken seriously as the costs of farm crime can impact on individual farmers, their families, local communities and consumers further afield as well as on the insurance and criminal justice industries.

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