

## ***Preventing farm crime***

A national farm crime survey in 2003 found that 17 percent of farms experienced farm crime at least once in the previous 12 months (Anderson & McCall 2005). From the sample who replied, farm crime was estimated to cost the Australian economy at least \$70 million annually. Highly accessible farms close to regional or urban centres were more likely to experience theft of farm machinery, vehicles or tools, or burglary, whereas very remote farms experienced the highest levels of livestock theft, illegal hunting and fishing, theft of materials, and illegal dumping of waste. Similar to a 2001 NSW study (Barclay & Donnermeyer 2007) fewer than half of the farmers had reported the crimes to police. The most commonly employed crime prevention strategies were locks on farm residences (67%) or barns/sheds (41%) and guard dogs/geese (39%). Half of all farmers were uncertain about the availability of crime prevention materials, with the majority relying on neighbours, local friends and family for advice.

The National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) is seen by many farmers and rural representatives as one of the most effective defences against livestock theft (Anderson & McCall 2005). The NLIS involves fitting livestock with an electronic tracking device, which can aid in tracking the animal throughout its life, using electronic scanners. It is now compulsory nationwide to register livestock, with some exemptions. However, some farmers are apprehensive about its use, due to implementation costs, reliance on post-event identification rather than prevention and the possibility of device substitution.

The Institute for Rural Futures' (2001) 12 fact sheets suggest a range of methods for improving security around grain and seed stores, the farmhouse, livestock, fuel tanks and farm machinery, etc. Specific measures include:

- have a good watchdog around the house
- be seen around your property and vary routines so people cannot easily anticipate when you will be home
- construct sturdy, secure sheds with good quality materials, including quality chains or locks. Always secure locks and gates, and keep fences and gates in good order
- mark or stamp your property with a permanent identification number
- compile and regularly update an inventory of all permanent property, stock, fertilisers and chemicals. Keep copies of this in different locations
- keep only as much fertiliser and chemicals as you need, as it will be easier to account for any losses
- keep photographs or video records of property or stock in case of theft

Creating a Neighbourhood Watch or Rural Watch Group to promote farm crime prevention is suggested by both Anderson and McCall, and the Institute for Rural Futures.

### **References**

Anderson K & McCall M 2005. *Farm crime in Australia*. Canberra: Attorney Generals Department

Barclay E & Donnermeyer J 2007. Farm victimisation: the quintessential rural crime, in Barclay E et al. (eds) *Crime in rural Australia*. Sydney: Federation Press: 57–68

Institute for Rural Futures 2001. *Crime prevention on farms* <http://www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au/rurcrime/brochures.htm>