# Is your livestock farm in the crosshairs?

## Vandalism and theft

## Vandalism & theft: An overview

There are many reasons vandalism and/or theft of property or livestock can occur. A disgruntled employee, upset neighbor or community member, activist making a demonstration or kids pulling a prank may all be possible reasons your farm could become a target.

Additionally, the recent increase in food costs seems to have created additional incentive for criminals to steal livestock.

Most livestock farms are located in rural areas and in many situations barns are on remote sites, with the owner or manager living several miles away. Although any location can be targeted, these remote sites typically have a higher risk.

## Preventative measures

Although it may be difficult to understand why someone would want to damage a farm and put livestock in a perilous situation, there are actions farmers can take to protect their livestock, facilities and livelihood.

### Look at your property through the eyes of a criminal

Criminals look to wreak havoc without being seen, taking much time or making much noise. Consider your office, records, feed and feed systems, alarm systems, electricity, vaccines, equipment and supplies. What could a criminal easily damage or steal?

### Vary routines

Be seen at the site often and vary routines. If criminals figure out there is a regular schedule, they will have a window of opportunity to cause destruction with lesser fear of being caught.

### Keep a good record of past employees

Document details about all of your employees - especially if there was a dispute or someone was let go.

### Secure tools and equipment

Be sure to keep your machinery and vehicles in a secure building or, at minimum, a well-lighted area. Do NOT leave equipment in a remote area, as it makes it an easy target. Always take the keys out and lock every vehicle and piece of equipment.

### Lock ALL doors

Secure all entrances to the facility by locking them whenever you leave the barn. It is also a good idea to lock all interior doors. If someone were to break into one part of the building, don't make it easy for them to get into other areas.

### Secure doors and door frames

Install steel door frames and doors with deadbolt locks, as they are more difficult to break into. If the door has a window, make sure it has a double deadbolt lock for additional security.

## Install security lighting

The more lights on the property, the more difficult it is for a vandal or thief to remain unseen. Install additional lights that operate on time switches or motion-activated sensors to discourage criminals.

## Utilize a camera or surveillance system

Although cameras and surveillance systems may be stereotyped as too expensive to justify the cost, there are many options available for only a few hundred dollars. Law enforcement officials highly recommend installing some form of security system, referring to it is “a cheap form of insurance.” In fact, in many instances, it is less expensive than an insurance deductible and may save you a lot of headache.

Additionally, if there is an incident, the records may help law enforcement apprehend the culprit more quickly, helping you sleep better at night and possibly preventing other damage.

Outdoor cameras work well for vehicle identification, but indoor cameras (placed at the point of entry) are more successful at identifying a person(s).

## Create an Emergency Action Plan

Livestock farmers need to have a plan to protect their farm, livestock and buildings. An Emergency Action Plan can not only help identify potentially dangerous situations, but also determine how they will be responded to.

It should include a list of important contacts and phone numbers, including: your veterinarian, neighbors, local emergency management office, insurance agent, fire department, sheriff’s office and employees.

It should also include a back-up plan for feed, electricity and other necessities for livestock survival and welfare.

Identify all of your animals and keep records so you can recover the live ones and document those that didn’t survive for insurance and tax purposes. Ear tags, branding, ear notching, etc. are all recommended methods of identifying livestock.

Be sure to register your premises - those premises that are registered are typically in a better position to have recovery efforts begin sooner.

Once the plan has been developed, be sure to share it with family, neighbors and employees and explain what their role will be. Post the plan in several locations that are easily accessible.

## Secure the premises

Limit access to the farm by gating all entrances. Preferably, have only one entrance to the animal area to better control and monitor all people and vehicles coming and going. For additional security, consider fencing the perimeter of the site.

Post signs at the farm entrance that indicate no unauthorized individuals should be on the site. For example, “stay off this farm unless given permission to enter” or “check-in with farm personnel upon arrival.” Consider posting a phone number at the farm entrance that visitors can call to make an appointment and individuals who notice something suspicious can call to report the activity.

## Identify property

Visit local law enforcement to obtain an “operation identification number.” It is a 10-digit-number that can help retrieve stolen items. Livestock can be identified with a tattoo; tools and equipment can be identified with a permanent stamp; and grain can be identified with “confetti” that can be augured in with the grain.

After labeling your property, be sure to post a warning sign (for example: “all property has been marked with an operation identification number and can be traced”) to further discourage criminals.

Additionally, keeping photo or video records of property and livestock can be beneficial for insurance purposes and/or identifying stolen items.

### Get involved with the community

Involvement in the community can pay bigger dividends than you may realize. If community members and, perhaps just as importantly, the local youth know who you are and respect you as a leader in the community, they may be less likely to commit a crime on your property.

### Be vigilant

Whatever you determine are the appropriate security measures for your farm, be vigilant in following those practices.

## What to do if you are a victim

If you are the victim of vandalism or theft, there are some things you need to do.

- Report the suspicious activity or incidents to local law enforcement *immediately*! Chances are, you are not the only one who has been targeted. Reporting the incident will help law enforcement determine the extent of the situation and get it resolved before more damage is done.
- Report all incidents, even if they seem minor. The criminals may be “testing the system” to see how much they can get away with.
- Increase your security measures.
- Do NOT confront the criminals. They may be armed and/or dangerous. Turn over any evidence to law enforcement and allow them to do their job.
- If you live in Iowa, contact the Coalition to Support Iowa’s Farmers at 1-800-932-2436. (If you live outside of Iowa, contact your local and state commodity organizations.) They may be able to help put together a reward for tips that lead to an arrest and conviction in the case. Generally speaking, the more media attention, the better as it usually generates more tips.

### Media tips

- Know the subject of the interview before you conduct it. Even if a reporter is coming out to discuss a possible subject, there is a chance that the questioning can vary. (Example: a reporter may ask to discuss a new hog barn and then veer to ask about animal cruelty.) Be clear about what you are willing and prepared to discuss.
- Keep emotions in check. Stick to the facts, but do allow your passion for farming/family to be evident. Understand that everything you say and discuss can be used in a story. There is no protection in saying, “This is off the record…” Never discuss something that you are uncomfortable seeing in print or on a newscast. The cameras and microphones are always on and the reporter is always taking notes, whether he/she is writing them down or remembering them.

If you are addressing a situation involving property or livestock

damage, stick to those facts! Do not place blame or hint to possible scenarios. Describe your situation, your concern for your animals, your farm and your family's safety and direct legal questions to the proper authorities. Discuss this with any authorities, such as police officers, to be sure that you are all on the same page. Ask not to offer implications until sufficient evidence supports such thoughts/ statements.

- Be polite, professional, courteous and helpful. A one-time interview opportunity could become a strong relationship with a reporter and increase the coverage of farming and rural issues at a station or newspaper.
- Know how you feel about the subject at hand. If the reporter's audience is the general public, consider how that issue affects the average consumer. Use a values-based approach and appeal to what consumers care about. (Example: if the reporter comes out to do a story on planting trees around a hog barn, mention how those barns offer pigs protection from the sun, temperatures, etc. during the summer.)
- Repeat your message. Repeat your message. Repeat…you get it! Even though a reporter might spend an hour or two with you at your farm, the average TV sound bite is 8 to 10 seconds and in newspapers, your section may receive a line or two if several sources are interviewed. Stay on message and you'll have a better chance of driving it home.
- Make sure your farm is in good condition before inviting a reporter or camera crew to do an on-site interview. Remember that most audiences don't have farm backgrounds to draw from. Things that you often take for "life on the farm," may not be acceptable in their eyes.
- While you want to be responsive to reporters, you don't need to commit to an interview immediately. If necessary, tell the reporter you're in the middle of a project and that you'll get back to them shortly. Collect your thoughts and know what you want to discuss. Contact the Coalition to Support Iowa's Farmers or your commodity organization to discuss the interview opportunity and determine if you'd benefit from having a staff member comment on the situation, as well. Support is just a phone call away.

COALITION TO SUPPORT IOWA'S FARMERS
www.supportfarmers.com

## About the Coalition to Support Iowa's Farmers

The Coalition to Support Iowa's Farmers is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization launched in 2004. Member organizations include the Iowa Cattlemen's Association, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Pork Producers Association, Iowa Poultry Association, Iowa Soybean Association, the Iowa Turkey Federation and the Midwest Dairy Association.

The Coalition has assisted nearly 1,500 farm families who raise livestock, dairy and poultry choose good sites for new barns and feedlots, follow all rules and regulations, protect air and water quality and enhance neighbor and community relations. The organization does not lobby or develop policy.

Farmers wanting assistance are encouraged to contact the Coalition at 1-800-932-2436 or go to www.supportfarmers.com. There is no cost for CSIF's services.

## Resources


"Animal Disease Emergencies: Local Preparedness and Response." Center for Food Security and Public Health. Iowa State University. http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Animal_Response/

"Crime stoppers." Iowa Farmer Today. May 7, 2011.

Iowa Crime Prevention Association.

Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.

Northern Tool and Equipment. www.northerntool.com

"Prevent Rural Crime." National Sheriff's Association. http://www.usaonwatch.org/assets/publications/RuralCrime.pdf

QC Supply. www.qcsupply.com

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