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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PROPERTY CRIME VICTIMIZATION AND CRIME PREVENTION: A STUDY AMONG FARM OPERATORS

Over the past decade, stories of agricultural crime have been prevalent in farm journals and rural newspapers. For example, the value of hogs stolen in one Indiana county totaled nearly \$200,000 during a recent twelve month period. The California Farm Bureau has estimated annual losses of theft from farm operations to be nearly \$30 million. An entry from Wallace's Farmer, dated October 23, 1976, told of an Iowa farmer who, while hospitalized, had 25 hogs and his pickup truck stolen. Presumably, the missing hogs were transported in the missing pickup truck. Finally, in a recent edition of the Ohio Farmer comes the story of a company which conned 300 farmers, who had each placed a \$3,000 deposit for the construction of farm buildings, out of their money.

Beyond anecdotal evidence, however, few systematic studies of farm crime have been completed. The exception is by Bean and Lawrence (1978) who conducted a study among 100 farm operators in Hampshire County, West Virginia. They found larceny, trespassing, and vandalism to be the most frequently occurring crimes; arson to farm buildings was the most costly, however.

In 1983 a victimization study was conducted among 1,200 farm operators throughout the state of Ohio in order to determine the nature and extent of agricultural crime. Personal interviews were conducted during the first six months of 1983 among full-time commercial farm operators from thirty of the eighty-eight counties in Ohio. The reference period used in the collection of information about farm victimization was a twelve month period immediately prior to the time of the survey.

Victimization incidents were divided into three types: household-related property crimes, property crimes specific to the operation of the farm, and personal-level incidents. Preliminary findings indicate that farm operators are indeed susceptible to crime. Nearly 48 percent of the sample had one or more crime incidents occur during the twelve month reference period utilized in the study (see Table 1).

Vandalism in general was the most frequently occurring type of incident, and nearly all the incidents were against farm property. Incidents ranged from the relatively minor with little dollar damage to several fairly costly incidents -- including damage inflicted against farm machinery. The average cost of an incident of vandalism was estimated by the victims to be \$147.

Table 1: Crimes Occurring to Farm Operations and Farm Operators

Type of Victimization	Number	Percent of Farms (N=1,200)	Percent of Incidents (N=663)
AROUND THE FARM HOMESTEAD			
Burglary - Residence	25	2.1	3.8
Attempted Burglary - Residence	10	0.8	1.5
Household Larceny - Around or Near the Homestead Premises	35	2.9	5.3
Household Larceny - Parts Attached to Family Vehicles	46	3.8	6.9
Motor Vehicle Theft - Family Vehicle	5	0.4	0.8
ON THE FARM			
Burglary - Farm Buildings	61	5.1	9.2
Attempted Burglary - Farm Buildings	11	0.9	1.7
Larceny - Around or Near the Farm Premises	120	10.0	18.1
Larceny - Parts Attached to Farm Machinery	23	1.9	3.5
Theft of Farm Machinery	10	0.8	1.5
Fraud - Receipt of Bad Check	56	4.7	8.4
Fraud - Consumer Purchase	41	3.4	6.2
Vandalism	178	14.8	26.8
PERSONAL - LEVEL INCIDENTS			
Larceny - Personal Items from Family Vehicle	23	1.9	3.5
Larceny - Away from Residence	5	0.4	0.8
Larceny - Pocket-Picking or Purse-Snatching	1	0.1	0.2
Robbery	4	0.3	0.6
Assault	8	0.7	1.2
Attempted Assault	1	0.1	0.1
Total	663		100.0

The second most frequently occurring crime type was larceny. Principally, the theft of farm property, and the theft of parts attached to family vehicles were the most usual types of victimization reported by farmers. Theft of farm property includes both machinery/equipment and livestock. However, contrary to popular media reports of farm thievery, very little livestock theft was detected in this study. In addition, there were only several cases of the theft of large farm machinery, such as a tractor or combine. Most cases of farm-related larcenies were of small tools and less expensive equipment, diesel fuel and gasoline from fuel tanks, and some incidents of stolen bags of seeds or drums of liquid fertilizer and pesticides. The average cost of the theft of farm property in or around the farm premises was \$149.

Although there were very few reported cases of the theft of parts attached to farm vehicles or of farm vehicles themselves, there were many incidents of the theft of parts attached to family vehicles (i.e., family station wagon or sedan). Most of these cases involved the theft of cassette players, CB radios, and batteries. The average cost of larceny to family vehicles was \$141.

The third most frequently occurring types of victimization were fraud. Altogether slightly more than one in every ten farm operators was the victim of fraud. The most characteristic variety was the receipt of bad checks. This finding was unexpected, but the description of these incidents by victims illustrates clearly the nature of this type of victimization. For most of their farm income, farmers sell to wholesalers, that is, they sell their products on a commodities market to companies who then re-sell or in some way process or prepare the purchase for the food retail market. However, on occasions, farmers act directly as retailers, that is, they sell produce directly to consumers, or barter, trade, or sell with suppliers and other farmers. In these situations they often accept checks in much the same way as a businessman of any retail operation accepts a check. However, farmers rarely go through any type of verification process. Hence, during the course of doing business, farm operators are apt to receive bad checks, and with little recourse for remuneration from the writers of those checks. The average cost of this type of fraud was \$193.

The second type of fraud concerns the purchase of defective farm inputs, ranging from fertilizer, seed, pesticide, and other supplies, to animals and machinery. The average cost of an incident of this type of fraud was \$616.

Burglary to farm buildings and the rural homestead represent the fourth leading type of victimization. Of note is the fact that attempted burglary appears very low when compared with national victimization research (U.S. Department of Justice, 1982). A suggested explanation for this is that a larger majority of burglary incidents are successful in rural localities than in urban areas. Few farm buildings have adequate locks, and many are situated at remote locations, often far from the homestead. Hence, given that the proportion of farms experiencing a successful burglary is high, the burglary of farms appears equal to those

reported for metropolitan areas. The average cost of the burglary of a farm building was \$254. The average cost of a home burglary was \$1065.

Personal-level incidents of victimization were relatively infrequent in comparison to those occurring to the homestead and the farm operation. In addition, there were few incidents of violent crime, such as robbery and assault. Most personal-level incidents occurred at locations other than the farm itself, such as at a retail shopping area, place of work outside the farm, and recreation/entertainment centers (i.e., bars, movie houses, parks etc.). Larceny of items from a motor vehicle was the most frequently occurring type of personal-level incident. The average cost of this crime type was only \$5.

The preliminary results from this study are that farms are likely targets for criminal victimization. The overwhelmingly majority of crimes occurring to farms are property-related. The average cost of specific types of criminal victimization are modest, with the exception of homestead burglary.

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