WINTER SECURITY PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Hi, I'm Will Evans. Welcome to another episode of Ahead of the Field from NFU Mutual. With the clocks going back, we're offering help and advice on something all farmers should be aware of. Winter security. I'll be talking to Robin Till from NFU Mutual's Risk Management Services whose expert consultants work with farmers around the UK every day, helping them to identify risks and protect themselves and their property. And also PC Steven Kaminski from Cheshire Police whose dedicated rural crime team have been leading the way with initiatives to make real changes.

Will: Robin, let's turn to you first. Now we're into the longer evenings, what are the main things that farmers should be aware of from a security perspective?

Robin: Okay. So 2019 NFU Mutual saw a real peak in crime with 54 million pounds the guesstimates of crime in the rural areas. And it's all across the UK as well although some parts are suffering more than others. And it's the darker nights you alluded to earlier Will, with the change in the clocks imminent, it just gives thieves more cover to work in. The weather's drawing in, the nights are drawing in, and it's just perfect conditions unfortunately for thieves to operate. We've got less people out on the roads. We've got less people to spot suspicious activity. So yeah, unfortunately that's what we tend to see.

Will: And what are the practical things that farmers and those living in the countryside can do to protect themselves better at this time of year in particular?

Robin: Well, there's some just absolute basics. And when I'm out talking to our farming clients, I tend to go back to the basics. NFU Mutual put together a risk management guide for a winter security, and I would certainly recommend everyone look and try and get a copy of that. But I always think, if you go back to the beginning and how you set your stall out on a farm, really, so anyone approaching the farm, what's the first thing I'm seeing? How have I got a big set of gates? Are the gates open, or are they nice and inviting, waiting for me to come through?

So I'd certainly be saying to people, look at your farm entrances, look at the number of entrances you've got. Do you need all of those entrances open at the moment? Or could you be funnelling traffic into areas where you can monitor it better? So past the farm house or past the staff accommodation. Good quality padlocks. Good quality chains to secure those gates. Absolutely no point having a good quality metal five- bar gate if it's just left open, people drive straight through.

Will: Mm- hmm ( affirmative).

Robin: Protecting gate hinges. It sounds basic again, but if you put a good quality padlock and chain on, the hinge then becomes the most vulnerable part. Can you just simply lift the gate off its hinges? So absolutely looking to protect the hinges, and what is stopping people just simply driving around the farm gates as well? We put up a big gate, but is it just a grass verge to either side? Thieves come prepared in 4x4s. So can they just drive around it? So yeah, marking tools, marking your equipment, marking your implements. There are lots and lots of different ways of doing that.

There are tracking devices out there. There are etching on to glass. There is indelible inks, anything basically that is going to identify that item back to your farm, it's going to link that item to a scene of a crime and therefore give the police an opportunity to link the person with that item to a scene of a crime, and hopefully prosecute them for handling stolen goods. And that will put thieves off. They want to be able to move things on nice and quickly, no trace back to a farm.

And NFU Mutual do some absolutely fantastic discounts in terms of security marking. The CESAR Mark, I think it's about a 12 and a half per cent discount we'll give you on agricultural vehicles. So absolutely worth looking at. ATVs, looking at immobilizers, looking at tracking devices, all these things, you don't like to think your item going missing, but if it does, all these will help us try to recover those. And we do see police forces recovering items, and they want to get those back to the original owner and all these things will help them do that.

Will: Yeah, we've seen sort of some farmers go to quite extreme measures with things like digging big buns around their farm, haven't we? Certainly in the East of England where they get a lot of problems with hare coursing and things like that. So, I guess farmers are being quite innovative in that regard.

Robin: I think, yeah, absolutely. I mean, the thieves will come prepared. They're tooled up and they've got the 4x4s and the like, and yeah, we will see people digging up trenches, people building up earth mounds in particular hotspots. If you can try and funnel the traffic into where you want them to be, so if you've got back access to your site, and don't forget, thieves are very good these days. A quick look on Google Earth and I can spot all the tracks across your farm, your estate. I can see where those tracks take me down to. I can see which lanes I can park up and then cross country. So yeah, it's looking too, if you can't protect the perimeter and let's face it, farms and estates, huge, huge boundaries to try and protect there. Then try and fall back to your key areas and think, " Well, how can I stop somebody?

Okay. If you want to be in the field you're in the field, but I can stop you getting into my yard. How can I funnel you into those areas and stop you getting into physical onto these premises?" And criminals like to stay in the car. They like to stay in their cab. It's nice. It's safe. They can lock the doors. They can put their foot down if they want to. If they have to get out onto foot, much more vulnerable, much more vulnerable to being intercepted. So look into strict vehicle access as it is a big one for me.

Will: Okay. Does it have to be expensive to secure a farm? Because things like security lighting are relatively inexpensive now, isn't it?

Robin: No, I think again, absolutely, go back to the basics. So some of the basic things you can do is to just avoid leaving theft attractive items out in the open. If you can't see it, then you're likely to just drive on to unfortunate another target. But if you've got expensive vehicles, expensive machinery, just park it away, put it behind something ugly, put it in something, and secure it. But again, free to do that one. Can you block off gates? Can you park vehicles in the way? Absolutely. Again, free to do something like that. All farms or most farms I go to will have some sort of lighting out in the yard, perfect time of year now with the darker nights and the clocks about to change too. Check your security lighting. Are all the bulbs working at the moment? Has some ... It's not nice to think about it, but has somebody been tampering with your bulbs so that the yard is nice and dark so they can come back in a couple of nights and take what they want to take?

Are the security cameras still pointing in the direction that they're intended to be pointing at? Again, thieves are very good at moving cameras around so that when they come back, again, free to do that one. Yeah, look into joining local Farm Watch groups, WhatsApp networks, again, spreading good information around the community. Whenever I go out and speak to our farmers, they really do know what's happening on their doorstep, and vehicles which have been sitting in the area quite often turn out to be perfectly innocent, but it's good to share that around. And it's good to get that information out there. And then there are some of the more expensive things you can do if you've got resources. Infrared beams across yards, which are looking to pick up human movement or vehicle movement, not looking to pick up animal movements. I think that would drive everyone absolutely crazy, but certainly human movement and vehicle movement.

Will: Yeah.

Robin: And if you've got a power supply and if you've got good lighting in the yard, again, infrared systems and they cover quite a large area as well. In a decent size farmyard you're looking at two or three sensors or four sensors to form a criss- cross, really quite straightforward. And if you want to get a bit more flashy, you can be looking at things like security fogging systems. We're seeing thieves come much more prepared now, especially when there are types of things like tractor GPS, quad bikes, ATVs, more expensive kits, some security fogging devices, which does what it says on the tin. It fogs out a particular area, an internal area, but then you're looking probably a couple thousand pounds, maybe a bit more for something like that. But when you think of the value of the kit inside, it's not a bad proportion really?

Will: Yeah. I mean, mentioning quad bikes and tractor GPS, is there anything in particular that thieves seem to be after?

Robin: Yeah, unfortunately, most things you find on a farmyard thieves want to be after. So, but there are some hotspots. Tractor GPS, this harvest time just went absolutely through the roof and all areas where there's big arable farms were being hit unfortunately. And then you've got the classics, quad bikes and ATVs. I mean every farmer listening to this will know somebody who's had an ATV or a quad bike go missing.

Will: Yeah.

Robin: Again, there are things you can do with that one, looking at quad bike devices to secure them internally. Tools, portable tools, power tools, always a classic favourite, hard to trace, easy to sell on, and trailers, again, we see trailers go constantly. Again, sometimes hard to secure, sometimes hard to put away, but it's all the classics I'm afraid.

Will: Okay. Steven, let's turn to you now. Perhaps you could just start by telling us a bit about your rural crime team.

Steven: Okay. So we were formed in October, 2019. We were set up as a dedicated rural wildlife and heritage crime team. We cover all three, a huge challenge and a really exciting undertaking for all the members of the team. We were incredibly pleased that Cheshire Police had recognized that there really was that demand out there within the rural communities. I think we'd be the first to admit that a long period of time had passed where possibly parts of the rural communities were being let down, or felt like they weren't being listened to. So we sort of took it upon ourselves to hit the ground running and do absolutely everything within our power to change that feeling amongst the rural and farming communities.

Will: That's really good to hear. Obviously it's darker now as we've talked about, but what is it about this time of year that means there's such a bigger threat?

Steven: I think there's some really good points that have been covered so far during this podcast. It doesn't have to be expensive. And I think that's what we have to steer away from, this fear, or this belief by a lot of people in the rural communities, that to make the farm safer, you're going to have to spend a load of money. It's not the case at all. These really simple things like checking light bulbs, checking things are still in working order. The cover of darkness and inclement weather has always been the perfect combination for criminals to go on to the farmyards and look, even if it's just a recce to see what's available, it's a really good opportunity for them to have a look around. And if it's the right time, they will absolutely take advantage of any vulnerabilities.

And we appreciate how busy farmers are. We really do understand that, but when it comes to the end of the day and you would ordinarily put a padlock on, or you'd put the tractor away or lock the quad bike, please don't cut corners and think " Oh, it'll be all right tonight." That one night where you don't put the security measures in place, that will be the night when the property goes. And we see it time and time again. If a tractor gets stolen, that's not just a vehicle, that's the farm's ability to perform their tasks and their jobs the following day. We understand the impact that can have on them. And we really try and stress that to other members of the police force, not just the rural crime team. We really want them to understand the impact it has when the property does go.

Will: So how are police farmers and rural communities working together to prevent and detect rural crime?

Steven: Well, what I think's fantastic is we almost had a ready- made voluntary police force within the farming communities. They were ready to go. The moment we set the team up they were more than happy to engage with us. They were very willing to pass us information. Now we've had to work hard because I think in the past farmers and members of the rural community may have reported incidents and they've heard nothing back. And I think what they'd really like to get is feedback. So if they pass us a registration plate or the description of someone, they'd like to know if that was of any use to us or a complete waste of time.

Will: Yeah.

Steven: And I think it's really important as police officers that we keep that open dialogue with them. We encourage them to report stuff. If it is useful, then we absolutely tell them it is. And we encourage them to report for future incidents. We've worked really hard to set up a Rural Watch, which I know it's been alluded to earlier in the podcast, there are different versions of Rural Watch throughout the country. So I can only really talk about the one in Cheshire because that's the one that obviously I use day in, day out, but what we've done is we've set up basically an information booklet, which we will give to members of the rural community. Contained within this booklet it will have a pro forma statement, which has the basics for if you're the victim of a burglary or your property has been stolen. It has a security checklist, a farm security checklist, which the farmer can do in his own time.

There's no requirement for us to go through it with him. It will also have a property checklist. So we all know that farmers have got all sorts of machinery, which they may have forgotten about. This is almost a prompt to go round the farm, document all the machinery you've got. Write the description, any unique markings, colours. Any CESAR marking that the property might have. So if you're the victim of a crime at three o'clock in the morning, rather than you having to rummage around in the barns and the farm and trying to search the property you've got, you simply hand it over to the police officer and then they can quickly upload it onto the system. And for me, I think that's really important. We've got to get the information out there as quickly as possible following an incident. It also contains a RABI booklet because we do understand the stresses that farmers are under.

Will: Yeah.

Steven: We understand the pressures, especially following an incident like that. So we think it's really important to include that sort of information as well. It's also got our rural crime team booklet, which talks about everything we do as a rural crime team and the type of stuff we cover. So we're pushing that out at the moment, we're hoping that with time farmers will continue to have the confidence to report stuff to us, and hopefully it'll make it harder for criminals to actually take that property if they decide to do so.

Will: Okay. Now we understand from the rural crime podcasts that we did at the beginning of August, that some types of rural crime fell during the initial COVID- 19 lockdown. What's the trend been in more recent months?

Steven: I think it's been a really challenging time for rural communities during COVID. I don't think we anticipated just how much of a demand it would place on the rural communities. If we look at things as simple as parking, parking across gates, the entrances to fields. That's been a huge stress and burden. Now in itself, you might say, well, is that a crime? Well, strictly speaking, perhaps not, but it's the impact that that could have. The farmers, they're not able to get into that field to undertake the work that they've planned for that day.

Will: Yeah. Yeah. It feels like a crime when you need to get into the field and it's going to rain tomorrow.

Steven: And I won't give any examples of tactics that farmers have suggested to me that they might use to move the vehicles, but I'm sure you can use your imaginations.

Will: Yeah, yeah.

Steven: That's been problematic, that just the sheer volume of cars on the rural roads, the infrastructure is not designed to have that volume of traffic.

Will: No.

Steven: That's an added stress when somebody is driving from A to B and having to pull in constantly, they can't get the tractor through. That's really made things difficult. The actual ... The number of people traipsing through the yards, people who aren't familiar with the location, during lockdown the last thing people wanted, the last thing farmers wanted was to be interacting with somebody from a different location or somebody that's not in their bubble. They don't want to put themselves at risk.

If the farmer becomes unwell, potentially, that's the work wiped out during the height of lambing season, nobody can work or you're having to get somebody in to work. Now, I don't think people quite understood just how stressful that could be for somebody. In addition to that, we noticed a significant increase in livestock attacks, because we've got more people in the countryside, we've got more dogs, more dogs off leads. Unfortunately, people were not taking responsibility, and our team has had a number of successful prosecutions, and we just think that it's so important if you are out walking your dog, that the dog is absolutely on the lead if you're near livestock. We cannot press that message enough. It's been a really challenging time I think.

In terms of ... I don't like to use the word more serious crimes, but if we're talking about the theft of plant machinery, et cetera, theft of ATVs, I wouldn't say in Cheshire we've noticed a particular increase, but it's difficult to say. It was more the other side of things that I noticed an increase in. And I think on the last podcast, Chris Pigott alluded to the night-time economy. Well, there hasn't been a night-time economy and what's happened now is the night-time economy has moved into places like national parks, Macclesfield Forest, for example, we've had lots of issues up there. People who would traditionally go out drinking in the pubs in town centres will now go out camping in large numbers, drinking and sometimes smoking cannabis. That has been a big problem for us. That's what we've experienced, and fires as well, fires that are out of control.

Will: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. What would be your main advice from a security perspective for farmers?

Steven: Well I think I'd like to say it's been really well- covered in the earlier section of the podcast. There's some excellent advice that's been given there. I think just take some time or set some time aside to walk around the farm, almost imagine that you were wanting to break into the property. How would you break into it? Try and identify any vulnerabilities that there might be. If it's a simple low- cost fix, then please, please just get it done. If it's something more expensive, consider whether or not it's going to be worthwhile in the long run, speak to any ... the farm risk managers, anyone who might be able to give you guidance on that. Please speak to your local officers, like I say, not all police forces have a dedicated rural crime team, but there will be local beat managers. There will be neighbourhood officers who would be more than happy to help out, local PCOs as well.

Most members of the community should know who their local police community sports officer is. If you do have any questions, concerns, please feel free to just ask the question and just try and be as vigilant as possible. We all know farmers work all the hours under the sun, and they are our eyes and ears on the ground. We absolutely encourage reporting everything to us. Please don't feel that it's something insignificant, you're wasting our time. You're absolutely not. That piece of information could form parts for the bigger picture. And unfortunately, I do think the theft of GPS domes is going to continue to increase. And we have noticed that in Cheshire as well. So that's something you really need to be mindful of at the moment.

Will: Okay. Thanks, Steven. Robin, just to bring you back in to finish, what can the farming community do or where can they go to get more support and relevant information?

Robin: Well, there's some excellent rural police forces and the contacts are Steven there. So there's certainly plenty of information from them. Contact NFU Mutual, speak to your local agent. We have loss control consultants, about 30 to 40 of those, spread up and down the country. We're always happy to come and see our members and give first-hand practical advice on the farm. Hopefully before you've had an issue rather than after, and trying to bolt the door after the horse has bolted I'm afraid.

Will: Okay. Well, sadly that's all we have time for, but thank you very much to you both for joining us today and keep up the good work.

Steven: Cheers. Thank you.

Robin: Thanks.

That's it. From this edition of Ahead of the Field. From me, Will Evans and everyone at NFU Mutual, we wish our listeners and the farming community a safe and secure end to the year.