

# READY FOR THE RETURNING THREAT

Rural Crime Report 2022



## LATEST TRENDS

Discover what's happening in the fight against rural crime



## LATEST FIGURES

Revealing the impact of challenging times on countryside crime



## LATEST INSIGHTS

From the people living and working on the frontline



**NFU Mutual**

# COMBATTING CRIME IN CHALLENGING TIMES



**Jim McLaren**  
NFU Mutual  
Chairman

An unmarked van pulling up outside a property may seem innocuous, but it is one of the many things that can rightly worry farmers and homeowners in isolated rural communities.

It may simply be a delivery, but all too often it marks a raid on a farm's tool store, or the return of thieves to steal a quad bike, tractor GPS system or other valuables.

A recent NFU Mutual poll discovered over a third of respondents know someone who has had to change the way they live or work due to rural crime.

With diesel and fertiliser prices soaring and the cost of living crisis biting, it looks likely that we will see rural crime rise in the coming months.

Current supply chain shortages mean farmers who suffer a theft are facing delays sourcing replacement equipment which may be vital to carrying out essential farm work.

Although there were welcome falls during the pandemic, reports of rural theft to NFU Mutual are on the increase and claims figures were up in the first quarter of 2022.

It's now time to take stock of the security measures we have in place across our fields and farmyards, and get ready for the returning threat of rural crime.

In this report, we take you through the latest trends to help you understand the threat and get ahead of rural thieves. NFU Mutual's security specialists have teamed up with police to explain the measures that work best and the steps we can take to protect our property no matter our budget.

At NFU Mutual, we foster and forge close links between farmers, police and our network of local Agents to make it harder for thieves to operate in the countryside. That's why NFU Mutual provided £430,000 in financial support to tackle rural crime in 2021, and why we'll continue the fight in the years to come – ensuring farmers and rural communities are protected from pernicious thieves and gangs in these difficult times.

Through advice from our own specialists and agricultural vehicle premium discounts to help absorb the cost of approved security measures, we will work to give farmers peace of mind and keep criminals out of the countryside.

# PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

Rural crime is a concern to **50%** of the rural community

Rural crime continues to be one of the biggest worries for our members and the wider rural community. Half of respondents to NFU Mutual's recent poll are concerned by rural crime, and a third say it is a major concern.

In 2021, we invested £430,000 to tackle the issue. Our in-house team worked closely with national police units, local forces, the security industry and agricultural machinery manufacturers to share information and assist crime prevention and detection.

Our continued funding and intelligence sharing with the dedicated agricultural vehicle theft unit at the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) saw £2.6m worth of stolen machinery recovered in 2021 - up from £2.3m in 2020. In addition, we provided financial support for the new ACE (Agricultural and Construction Equipment) police unit.

To help farmers with the cost of improving security, we also introduced a new discount scheme for Scorpion security products. This is in addition to our existing agricultural vehicle insurance discounts for members who use measures such as CESAR marking and approved tracking, immobilisation and mechanical devices.

We also helped farmers fight rural crime by:

- Funding CESAR marking for 200 quads in Northern Ireland, working with Datatag and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- Providing Selecta DNA marking kits, a 4x4 vehicle and continued funding to the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC)
- Supporting Devon & Cornwall Police with a livestock theft initiative on Dartmoor
- Awarding one-off funding to assist ten police forces with GPS-theft operations
- Working with leading manufacturers to provide free trackers and immobilisers on replacement quads and ATVs after a paid claim to prevent repeat thefts
- Sponsoring a connected farm project to test new technology

## CONTENTS

- 02. Combatting crime in challenging times
- 03. Protecting our communities
- 04. Latest trends and the returning threat
- 07. Protecting your property and preventing crime
- 08. The cost to the countryside
- 10. Views from the field



# LATEST TRENDS AND THE RETURNING THREAT



**Rebecca Davidson**  
Rural Affairs Specialist

The cost of rural crime dropped by 9.3% in 2021, the second annual fall since the start of the pandemic. Security measures, rural crime initiatives, quieter roads and community vigilance have all played their part in suppressing countryside crime. However, now is not the time for complacency.

The first quarter of 2022 suggests a worrying return to pre-pandemic crime levels, with costs up by over 40% from the same period the previous year. As prices rise, supply chains strain and crime gangs are able to travel more freely, we are concerned that thieves are already looking to make up for lost time. According to NFU Mutual's recent poll, this concern is also shared by the rural community as 89% of respondents are worried that inflation and the increased cost of living will lead to an increase in rural crime.

## Quad and ATV theft

Quad and ATV theft reported to NFU Mutual cost £2.2m in 2021. While this is almost 11% down on the previous year, the data warns of a recent upward trend. Almost half of quad and ATV thefts reported to NFU Mutual last year took place between September and December.

Shipping delays and the effects of Covid and Brexit are contributing to a rise in demand for both new and second-hand farm machinery. As waiting lists grow and market values soar, thieves are seeing quads and ATVs as easily portable, hot ticket items.

## Land Rover Defender theft

Last year saw a sharp rise in the cost of Land Rover Defender theft. Stolen vehicles and dismantled parts were responsible for a loss of £2.6m, an increase in value of 87% on the previous year, with the number of thefts growing by 34%. Current trends suggest these numbers will increase further in 2022.

The iconic position held by classic Land Rovers means the vehicles and their parts will always be a target for thieves, and high demand and limited supply means the value of second-hand cars and replacement parts has rocketed.



**Fuel theft is becoming a prominent issue both locally and nationally as the price of the commodity repeatedly hit record levels. Unfortunately, this means thefts also costs victims dearly, not to mention the physical, environmental and psychological damage caused.**

**Ian Cox**  
Inspector, Rural Crime Team,  
Norfolk Police

## Agricultural Vehicle and GPS Theft

The total cost of agricultural vehicle theft claims remained at the same level last year at £9.1m, as organised criminal gangs targeted farmyards for high-value tractors, GPS systems and trailers.

With supply chain issues affecting the sector, farmers suffering the theft of an agricultural vehicle or GPS system can also face severe disruption to essential harvest and cultivation work.

Some good news is that partnerships with the police, increased investment in NaVCIS and one-off grants to help forces tackle GPS theft saw the cost of this crime reported to NFU Mutual nearly halve to £1.5m last year and we are continuing our efforts to reduce this crime.

However, thieves never give up and trailer theft is now becoming a major problem, with claims totalling £1.75m received by NFU Mutual in 2021 - up almost 5% on 2020. Often left in fields and farmyards for long periods with little security, trailers are difficult to trace but easy to sell on without documentation, making them a favourite target of rural thieves.

## Fuel theft

**49%**  
say fuel theft is the rural crime they are most concerned about

Theft of diesel, heating oil and other fuel dropped slightly from 2020 to 2021. However, latest claims indications from 2022 suggest that fuel theft is on the rise again. As fuel prices rocket, the first half of this year has seen both the cost and frequency of fuel thefts more than double compared to the same period last year.

Heating oil theft can leave isolated rural households without warmth during the coldest days of the year, while theft of diesel and other fuel leaves farmers with hefty restocking bills and interrupts vital work during a period when farmers can least afford to stop.

# LATEST TRENDS AND THE RETURNING THREAT

## Rustling

Latest analysis shows that livestock theft cost UK farmers an estimated £2.4m in 2021. Rustling remains one of the costliest thefts to farming, and with the end of Covid lockdowns comes the worry that rustling could rise again. Soaring food prices makes rustling a more lucrative crime for criminal gangs and increases the toll each theft has on farmers.

## Dog attacks on livestock

The 'pandemic-generation' of new pets and a lack of awareness among owners took their toll last year, with farm animals worth an estimated £1.5m injured and killed by dogs across the UK. Pregnant ewes and new-born lambs were horrifically killed and injured, while farmers' livelihoods were also put on the line.

An NFU Mutual survey shows 73% of dog owners (up from 64% in 2021) now allow their pets to roam off-lead in the countryside – despite 49% admitting their dog doesn't always come back when called.



“We were very shaken up by what happened. It's not the money lost - it's what those lambs went through that haunts us.”

Steven Gunn  
Livestock farmer affected by dog attacks

# PROTECTING YOUR PROPERTY AND PREVENTING CRIME

NFU Mutual's rural security expert Bob Henderson and DC Chris Piggott from the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service provide practical crime prevention advice.



## GET INTO GOOD HABITS

“Opportunists and criminal gangs look for easy ways to steal valuables, like unlocked buildings or unattended vehicles with keys in them. By building good habits, farmers and the wider rural community can make life more difficult for would-be thieves.”

DC Chris Piggott

- Lock the main gate and check the perimeter is secure.
- Remove keys from vehicles whenever you leave them. Store keys in a safe, secure place.
- Keep farm machinery and vehicles in a lockable building and out of sight of thieves.
- Lock away high-value items like GPS systems and power tools.
- Check the provenance of the kit you buy to ensure it isn't stolen.
- Note serial and chassis numbers of items you own.
- Report suspicious activity to the police.



## SMART MEASURES AGAINST CALCULATED CRIME

“There are simple, time-honoured ways to protect your property from thieves, as well as new, state-of-the-art methods to make farms, homes and kit less attractive.”

Bob Henderson

- CESAR mark, etch or indelibly mark farm name and post code onto kit so it's harder to sell on.
- Install CCTV, security lighting and an alarm.
- Fit vehicles with a tracking device and immobiliser. NFU Mutual offers premium discounts when approved security measures are used.
- PIN protect GPS systems and apply manufacturer stickers.
- Fit a fuel tank lock or sensor.
- Join a rural watch or farm watch scheme.
- Use mechanical immobilisers like steering wheel or pedal locks on vehicles.
- Animals are still effective early warning systems. Noise can scare criminals off.

ADVICE ON TRACTOR SECURITY

FIND OUT MORE

ADVICE ON ATV SECURITY

FIND OUT MORE

ADVICE ON FARM SECURITY

FIND OUT MORE

ADVICE ON GPS SECURITY

FIND OUT MORE

# THE COST TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Rural theft cost the UK an estimated **£40.5m** in 2021

Based on our claims statistics, we estimate that rural theft cost the UK £40.5m in 2021, a 9.3% decrease on the previous year.

Most areas saw a fall in rural crime costs, but figures for Scotland jumped by over 50% - however, its baseline figure was lower than many other parts of the UK and recovery rates of stolen agricultural machinery have been strong. The Midlands and South East also missed out on the national decrease, with costs in these regions rising slightly.

Although a reduction in the cost of crime is welcome news, the pandemic period has been an exception and it appears that the relative respite from rural theft will be sadly short-lived. While there have been significant decreases in costs - 19% in 2020 and 9.3% in 2021 - the trend is starting to reverse and the threat of rural crime is once again returning. Initial estimates from our 2022 claims figures indicate a cost rise of over 40% in the first quarter of the year, and experts warn of a return to pre-pandemic crime levels.

Meanwhile, the financial impact of each incident is hitting farmers even harder and at a time when global food supplies are under pressure. So while there may have been fewer thefts in 2021, the average claim cost rose over 11%.

**34%** of people polled know someone who has been forced to change the way they live or work as a result of rural crime

## The cost of rural theft around the UK

Region or Country	Cost in 2021	Cost in 2020	% Change from 2020
East	£5.1m	£6.6m	-22.4%
Midlands	£8.4m	£8.3m	+1.7%
North East	£6.7m	£8.0m	-15.4%
North West	£2.8m	£3.8m	-25.3%
Northern Ireland	£1.7m	£2.1m	-18.7%
Scotland	£2.6m	£1.7m	+52.3%
South East	£7.5m	£7.4m	+1.1%
South West	£4.3m	£5.3m	-18.0%
Wales	£1.3m	£1.6m	-17.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£40.5m</b>	<b>£44.7m</b>	<b>-9.3%</b>

Estimates based on NFU Mutual claims statistics, costs rounded to the nearest £100,000. Percentage changes are based on exact figures.

## The 10 worst affected counties by cost in 2021, based on NFU Mutual claims statistics.

Rank	County	2021	2020	% Change from 2020
1	Lincolnshire	£2,406,760	£2,545,570	-5.5%
2	Essex	£1,651,877	£1,683,052	-1.9%
3	Kent	£1,382,426	£1,445,717	-4.4%
4	Leicestershire	£1,235,802	£1,244,881	-0.7%
5	Suffolk	£1,178,428	£1,470,057	-19.8%
6	Gloucestershire	£1,162,932	£1,162,675	0.0%
7	Lancashire	£1,134,391	£1,484,103	-23.6%
8	Hampshire	£1,129,631	£1,305,965	-13.5%
9	Warwickshire	£1,121,075	£1,170,073	-4.2%
10	Shropshire	£996,283	£1,338,843	-25.6%

## 2021 IN NUMBERS



**GPS THEFT COST £1.5M**

A 47% decrease from 2020 thanks to targeted support for police operations



**AGRICULTURAL VEHICLE THEFT COST £9.1M**

Matching last year's figures despite the wider drop in rural crime costs



**TRAILER THEFT COST £1.75M**

An increase of nearly 5% as thieves again set their sights on larger equipment



**LIVESTOCK THEFT COST £2.4M**

An increase of 3.7% on 2020



**LAND ROVER DEFENDER THEFT COST £2.6M**

A rise of 87% on the previous year



**QUAD AND ATV THEFT COST £2.2M**

A fall of almost 11% from 2020

# VIEWS FROM THE FIELD



**Caron Whaley**  
RABI Director of Services

RABI's Big Farming Survey report confirmed how badly rural crime can affect farming people. Thirty-eight percent of the 15,000 respondents said that rural crime was a source of stress, with the response rate rising to 51% amongst cereal farmers who appear to be hardest hit.

In farming one problem is never just one problem, with several factors combining to cause stress. Our research shows farming people, on average, deal with six stress factors simultaneously. The survey also identified a direct correlation between mental and physical wellbeing and the financial health of their farming business. Those experiencing moderate or severe anxiety also reported a greater number of factors causing significant stress. Rural crime was the fifth most cited cause of stress, making it a concerning issue for the sector.



**David Exwood**  
NFU Vice President

Rural crime remains a huge issue for farmers up and down the country. Despite the cost of rural crime going down in 2021 due to lockdown, cases are on the rise again at a great cost to farm businesses, farming families and rural communities.

The nature of rural crime is also changing. As more criminals have access to new technologies and with more business transactions happening online, we also need to adapt and it's great to see some police forces already adjusting.

Our recent successes in strengthening legislation around hare coursing and illegal encampments, which the NFU campaigned so hard for, are also vital, delivering tougher penalties and greater police powers to deter offenders.

But we can't stop here. Farmers, the police and policymakers must continue to work together on a national and local level to build a structure that will prevent rural crime, underpinned by solid legislation.



**Dr Kreseda Smith**  
Lecturer, Rural Criminologist, Harper Adams University

I undertook a recent survey of rural residents to explore their confidence and satisfaction with rural crime policing teams. Overall, general confidence in the police among rural communities remains low, with many still reporting feeling like second class citizens. This is despite an increasing number of forces establishing rural crime teams.

Although numbers were small, this exploratory research seems to suggest that just having rural crime teams does not greatly improve confidence and satisfaction. What seems to be more important for rural residents is for rural crime teams to be properly resourced and easily and directly contactable by the rural communities they serve. This will help them provide feedback to victims directly, even if it's just to say no one has been caught.



**Rhianna Montgomery**  
NFU Scotland Rural Business Policy Advisor

Over the past year, NFU Scotland (NFUS) has been working tirelessly to support our members and secure increased sanctions on owners whose dogs worry, attack or kill livestock.

Livestock worrying is an extremely emotive topic for the vast majority of NFUS members, with many suffering the consequences of irresponsible dog ownership on a regular basis. NFUS lobbied hard for penalties faced by irresponsible dog owners to be increased and we were delighted to work with Emma Harper MSP on her Protection of Livestock (Scotland) Bill. With maximum penalties now increased to £40,000 and 12 months' imprisonment, we have been working with various stakeholders to raise awareness and promote the new legislation.

Our current focus is on ensuring that tourists and holidaymakers are made aware of their responsibilities in all aspects of having access to the Scottish countryside.



**Rob Taylor QPM**  
Wales Rural & Wildlife Police Coordinator

After fulfilling and exceeding its primary objectives over an initial 12-month trial, the new post of 'Wales Rural and Wildlife Police Crime Coordinator' has received a further three-year commitment from the Welsh Government.

The new post has seen a number of exciting projects and engagement with our rural communities throughout Wales, including a Welsh strategy to tackle farm crime and livestock attacks. The four policing areas of Wales now work together even closer to tackle farm issues, with a crossover of excellent ideas and a first-class training programme at a local farming college to help rural officers fully understand the farming environment and associated problems.



**Superintendent Johnstone McDowell**  
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Lead for Rural and Wildlife Crime

As the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI) newly appointed Lead for Rural and Wildlife Crime, I am committed to supporting our rural communities.

PSNI is committed to driving down rural crime and, while it is encouraging that our figures show a fall of over 33% in the number of incidents over the last 12 months (to 31st March 2022), we understand statistics only tell part of the story. We know from our work with victims of crime that every incident has an impact and so we continue to work with the Rural Crime Partnership and communities to combat and deter criminals.

Our Crime Prevention Officers and local officers continue to work to protect property and prevent crime, fitting over 136 quads with Datatag, as part of a scheme part funded by NFU Mutual. We hope that this will go some way to preventing theft in our rural communities.

Working collaboratively means we can respond to emerging crime trends.

# THE UK'S LEADING RURAL INSURER

NFU Mutual offers a wide range of products, including general insurance, life, pensions, and investments. These products and services are delivered through our network of NFU Mutual Agent offices, as well as through our direct sales and service centres.

With 295 local businesses located in rural towns and villages throughout the UK, NFU Mutual has become part of the fabric of rural life and remains committed to serving the needs of our members nationwide.

NFU Mutual is proud to deliver more than simply insurance. Making farming safer, supporting rural initiatives across the UK and helping to look after the environment are just some of the ways we support our communities.

For more information or to download a copy of this report visit:

**[nfumutual.co.uk/ruralcrime](https://nfumutual.co.uk/ruralcrime)**

Join in the conversation using **#ruralcrime**



Twitter: @nfum



Linkedin: nfu-mutual



Facebook: NFU Mutual



Instagram: nfu\_mutual

## Report Rural Crime

In an emergency always call **999**, otherwise call 101.

Want to remain 100% anonymous? Contact the independent charity Crimestoppers online at **[crimestoppers-uk.org](https://crimestoppers-uk.org)** or by calling **0800 555 111**.

NFU Mutual works closely with the police and farming unions to tackle rural crime.

For more information on the farming unions, visit:

NFU in England and Wales **[nfuonline.com](https://nfuonline.com)**

NFU Scotland **[nfus.org.uk](https://nfus.org.uk)**

Ulster Farmers Union **[ufuni.org](https://ufuni.org)**



**NFU Mutual**

**If you'd like this document in large print, braille or audio, just contact us.**

If you're hard of hearing or deaf, or you have difficulty with your speech, you can contact us by using the Relay UK app on your smartphone or tablet, or by dialling 18001 before our number on your textphone.

The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited (No.111982). Registered in England.  
Registered Office: Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 7BJ.

For security and training purposes, telephone calls may be recorded and monitored. Printed on environmentally friendly paper.

REP-RUR-0822