

# THE IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITIES

Rural Crime Report 2021



## LATEST TRENDS

Discover what's happening in the fight against rural crime



## LATEST FIGURES

Revealing the impact of the pandemic on countryside crime



## LATEST INSIGHTS

From the people living and working on the frontline



**NFU Mutual**

# NFU MUTUAL'S COMMITMENT TO REDUCING RURAL CRIME



**Jim McLaren**  
NFU Mutual  
Chairman

As a farmer myself, I know from personal experience that rural crime in whatever form it takes – such as agricultural vehicle theft, livestock rustling or fly-tipping – is far more than an inconvenience. It's a major disruption that can have a real impact on a farmer's work life, family life and mental wellbeing - especially at critical times like harvest or lambing.

While the scale of rural theft can be gauged by its cost – an estimated £43.3m last year – the anxiety experienced by farming families, who constantly feel they are being watched by determined criminals waiting for opportunities to steal, is impossible to calculate.

We're convinced that when NFU Mutual Agents and our national specialists work together with police,

farmers and other rural organisations to tackle rural crime we can make a difference.

We're helping police join forces with local farmers; we're funding a dedicated agricultural vehicle crime unit; and we're even bringing home stolen machinery from across Europe.

We recognise the past year has been particularly difficult for everyone, which is why we are putting additional funding into rural crime initiatives to take our total investment to over £430,000 this year.

It's a coordinated approach designed to make it tough for thieves to steal in the countryside, and to repel an expected new wave of criminality as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.



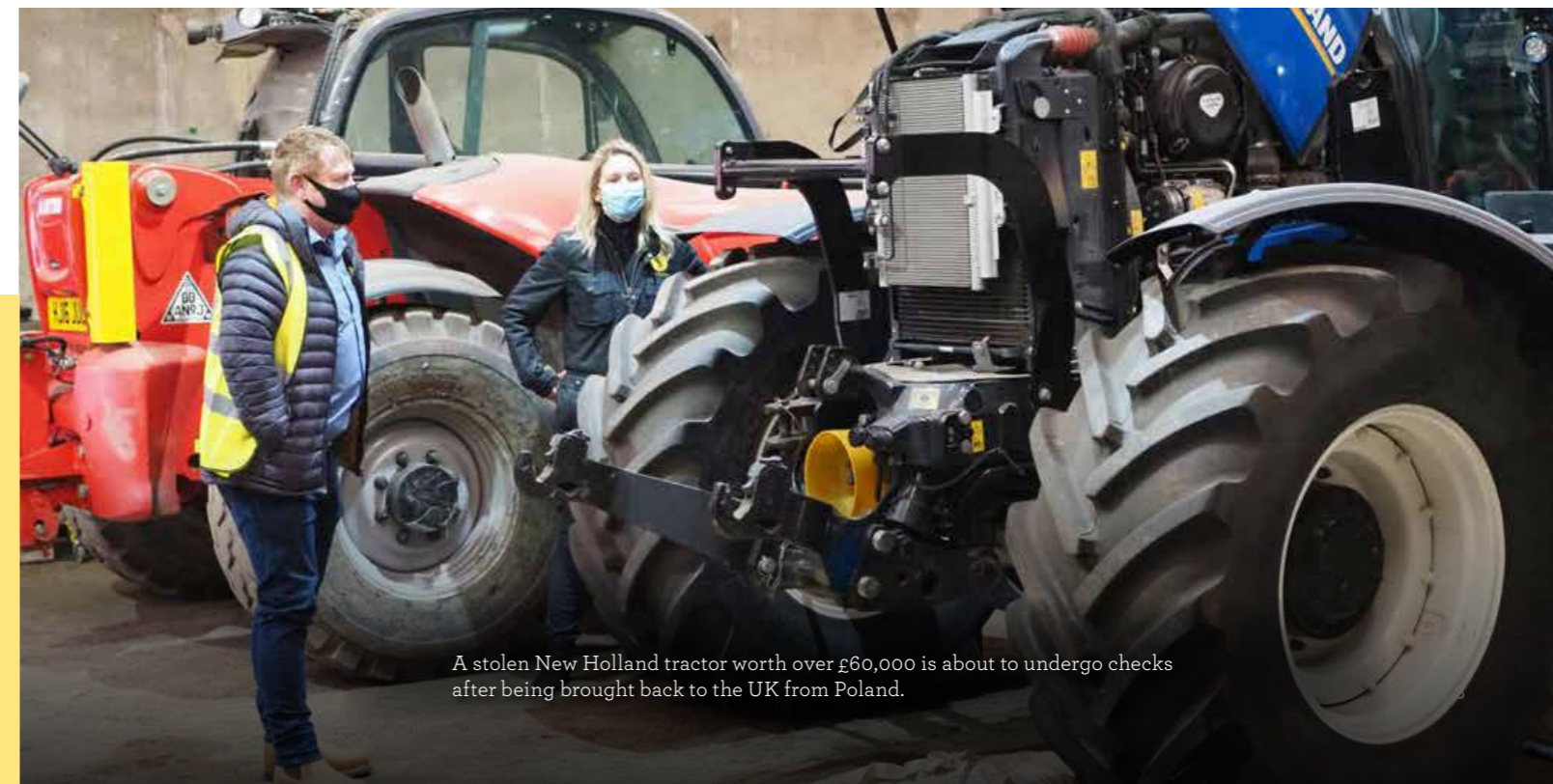
# THE IMPACT WE'RE HAVING

Over  
**£430k**  
invested  
throughout  
2021

NFU Mutual is investing over £430,000 this year in local, regional and national initiatives to help farmers and rural communities tackle the menace of rural crime.

Our commitment includes:

- Tackling agricultural vehicle theft by providing extra funding for a dedicated National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) unit to work with police forces nationwide and disrupt criminal gangs
- Working with police to seize stolen machinery from overseas. Recent recoveries have been made from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Spain
- Launching a project with leading manufacturers to provide free trackers and immobilisers to quad-theft victims after a paid claim so they don't suffer repeat thefts
- Providing more incentives for farmers to invest in security through a new discount scheme for security products, in addition to existing agricultural vehicle insurance reductions when fitting approved devices
- Providing funding and expertise to the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC) and local partnerships
- Supporting new security marking and prevention initiatives in Northern Ireland, as well as serving as a member of the Northern Ireland Rural Crime Partnership
- Sponsoring two cutting-edge farm projects in England and Scotland using Internet of Things sensors to alert farmers to suspicious activity
- Finding new ways to fight rustling by supporting livestock theft projects with local police
- Providing support to the newly established ACE (Agricultural and Construction Equipment) police unit



A stolen New Holland tractor worth over £60,000 is about to undergo checks after being brought back to the UK from Poland.

## CONTENTS

- 02. Foreword by NFU Mutual Chairman, Jim McLaren
- 03. The impact we're having
- 04. Pandemic trends
- 07. Rural security advice
- 08. Rural crime around the UK
- 10. Views from the field



# PANDEMIC TRENDS



Rebecca Davidson  
Rural Affairs  
Specialist

Despite an overall fall in rural theft during lockdown, the downside was that when criminals struck, they struck harder, using new tactics to overcome security.

NFU Mutual research found that 45% of our customers experienced stress and anxiety in 2020. The threat of becoming a victim of rural crime can add to feelings of vulnerability and isolation, so it's important we work together to support each other in the fight against rural crime.

## Rural Wraiths and the surge in GPS theft

In demand across the globe, Tractor Global Positioning Systems (GPS) have become the rural thieves' top target. Gangs dubbed 'Rural Wraiths' are now using silent electric scooters to steal farmers' £10,000 systems and make off along country lanes at high speed. Without GPS systems – an essential part of modern farming – harvests can be delayed and farmers are left unable to work. NFU Mutual has supported specialist police operations across the country to tackle GPS theft.

**“It was debilitating for our business to lose GPS systems from our tractors and combine right in the middle of harvest. The gang were highly organised and left us feeling vulnerable.”**

GPS-theft victim

## Portable, high-value quads and ATVs

Determined rural thieves increased the value of their hauls under lockdown by targeting farmers' expensive quad bikes and side-by-side utility terrain vehicles (UTVs). These vehicles, which can cost twice as much as a regular quad, now represent 14% of all quad and ATV thefts, compared to 11% in 2019.



**“It is unsettling to think that people might be staking out the farm and trying to work out what we have here, particularly as it's not just a place of work but my home too. I'm sure the thieves know the layout of farms in the area and come prepared to load up quads and any other equipment they can get their hands on.”**

Richard Wilcox, Quad-theft victim



**“The lambs were probably stolen to order and so they would have all been packed into that van without food or water - there would have been no welfare standards at all. We can only imagine what happens to them next. You have to almost try not to think about it as it's so difficult to comprehend.”**

Richard Hoskin, Livestock theft victim

## Stemming the tide of rustling

Farm animals worth an estimated £2.3m were stolen from UK farms last year, making rustling one of the most costly crimes for the UK's farmers.

While co-ordinated policing and Coronavirus restrictions led to the cost of rustling falling by a quarter, it is deeply concerning that large-scale, organised crime continues to cause suffering to animals, adding financial pressures to farmers and putting public health at risk.

## Demand for lockdown pets drives dog theft

Over the last year, NFU Mutual has seen a rise in the cost of theft of both pet and working dogs, with some farms losing several sheepdogs at a time. Some dog owners are no longer walking pets in remote locations, and others are changing their routines to protect their dogs from thieves.

**“Her financial value is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what her loss has cost us. We were simply devastated to lose her. She was a huge part of our family and our farm business. Not only was her work rate worth about three people, but she was my husband's best friend.”**

Working dog-theft victim



# PANDEMIC TRENDS

## Surge in dog ownership takes toll on livestock farmers

One tragic effect of the lockdown surge in dog ownership and countryside visits has been a 10.2% rise in the toll of dog attacks on farm animals.

The cost of dog attacks on sheep and cattle was £1.3m last year – and the situation is worsening: NFU Mutual claims data shows the cost of attacks shot up 50% in the first quarter of 2021. However, the story behind the figures is even more concerning. Livestock worrying causes horrific suffering to sheep and cattle – and repeated attacks have devastated farmers and their families.

## Fly-tipping

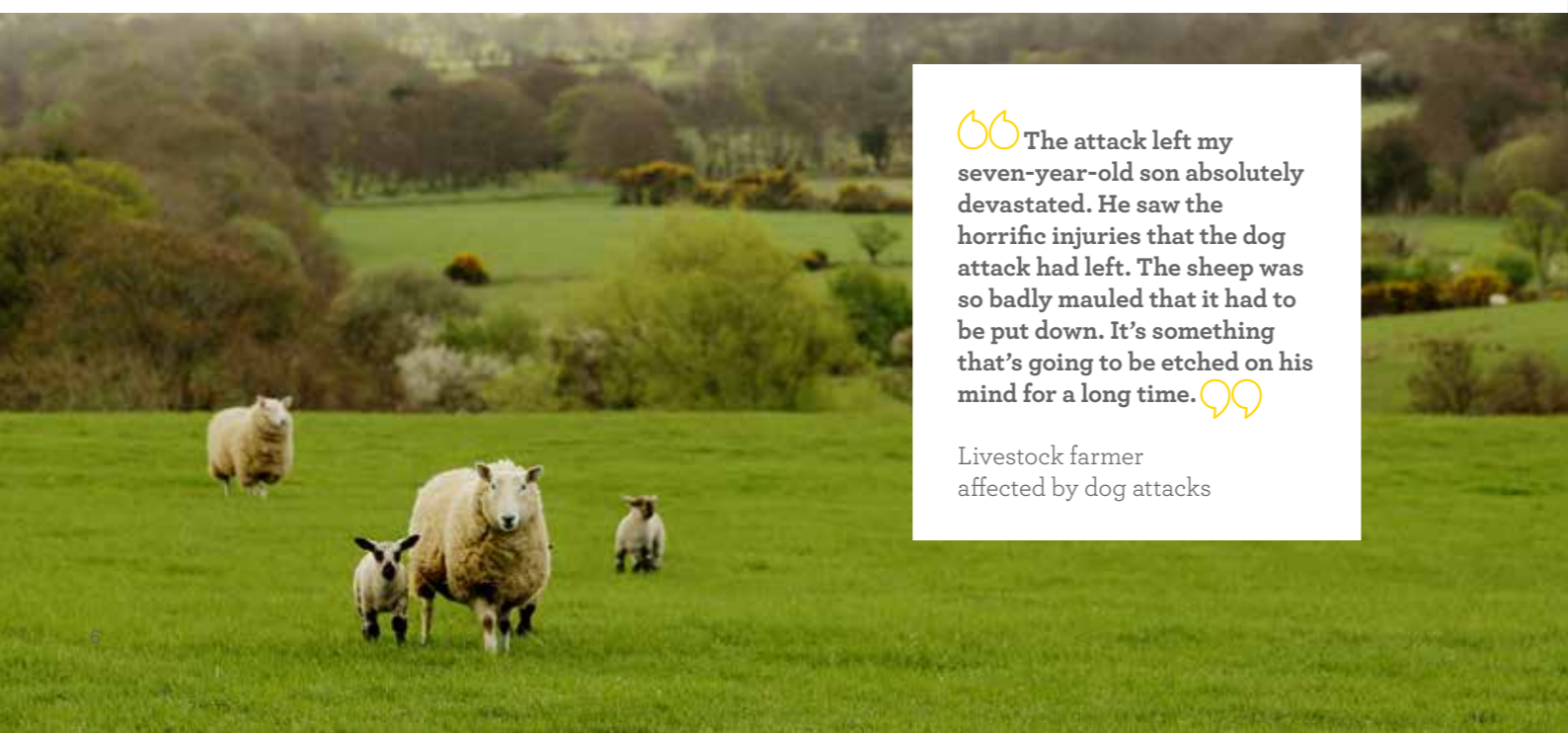
Fly-tipping in fields, gateways and country lanes reached epidemic proportions as access to waste recycling centres was restricted by lockdown and unlicensed operators dumped large volumes of waste.

**“Fly-tipping is a constant threat to human and animal health, undermines the safety of those who live and work in the countryside and is a permanent scar on our natural environment. Despite recycling centres re-opening, fly-tipping incidents are still being recorded daily by NFU Scotland members and are a continuous blight on rural Scotland.”**

Martin Kennedy, NFU Scotland President

## Farmers fall victim to cyber scams

Cybercrime is another growing danger faced by modern farmers, with NFU Mutual research showing that 62% of customers have increased their internet use during the pandemic. From phishing emails focusing on farm payments, to scam adverts for agricultural machinery, cyber criminals are creating tailored attacks to target the nation’s farmers. According to the NFU, almost half (46%) of businesses have identified cyber security breaches or attacks in the past 12 months.



**“The attack left my seven-year-old son absolutely devastated. He saw the horrific injuries that the dog attack had left. The sheep was so badly mauled that it had to be put down. It’s something that’s going to be etched on his mind for a long time.”**

Livestock farmer affected by dog attacks

# RURAL SECURITY ADVICE

NFU Mutual has joined forces with Stuart Ward, Police Scotland’s National Architectural Liaison Support & Development Officer, to provide advice on basic rural security measures.

“The pandemic may have caused a sharp reduction in crime in general, but rural crime has not gone away. The countryside still attracts criminal elements, who are looking to exploit any opportunity that may result in a gain to themselves. But even so-called nuisance crimes have a significant impact on the day-to-day operation of rural business.

There are many things you can do to reduce the risk of being the victim of rural crime. Our team of Police Architectural Liaison Officers work across farms, rural businesses and homes to assess and examine properties. We look at security measures, perimeters and access routes through to the buildings, and offer practical advice.”

# RURAL SECURITY CHECKLIST



## PHYSICAL

- Keep farm vehicles out of sight. Lock them up and remove the keys
- Block or fill in access points that aren’t regularly used
- Cut down overgrown planting that could be used by thieves carrying out surveillance
- Store tools in security cages or anchor down your quad
- Remove GPS systems wherever possible, and mark your kit with forensic or indelible ink
- Fit window locks, and lock entrance doors even when you’re home



## COMMUNITY

- Join your local Rural and Farm Watch schemes
- Use closed WhatsApp groups to share information about local criminal activity
- Keep in contact with your neighbours and get to know your local rural crime team
- Report all crimes and suspicious sightings to police
- Use the Crimestoppers number to report rural crimes anonymously



## TECHNOLOGY

- Use ‘Driveway’ detectors on access routes to your property
- Consult with a Police specialist about the most appropriate CCTV system
- Fit tracking devices and immobilisers to quads and tractors
- Use floodlights and movement detection alarms on farm buildings
- Use CESAR vehicle marking to deter thieves and aid recoveries
- Fit a fuel tank alarm to notify you of an attack on fuel tanks

# RURAL CRIME AROUND THE UK

Rural theft cost the UK an estimated **£43.3m** in 2020

From its claims statistics, NFU Mutual estimates that rural theft cost the UK £43.3m in 2020, a 20% decrease on the previous year.

While the number of theft claims went down, thieves got more bang for their buck as the average cost rose to £4,425 – up from £4,128 in 2019.

Lockdown movement restrictions, police rural crime teams, and beefed-up farm security helped to curb crime over the pandemic, with most parts of the UK seeing an overall decrease in cost.

However, skilled and highly-organised criminals continued to plague farmyards during the pandemic, stealing tractor GPS systems, high value quad bikes and ATVs worth millions of pounds.

The cost of agricultural vehicle theft claims reported to NFU Mutual remained high at £9.1m as gangs capitalised on the countryside. Agricultural vehicle theft saw only a 2% drop in cost from 2019, still well above 2018's total of £7.4m.

While livestock theft decreased by 25% to an estimated £2.3m, the South West region saw the cost of rustling rise by over a third.



## 2020 IN NUMBERS



**GPS THEFT COST £2.9M**

almost twice last year's figure



**AGRICULTURAL VEHICLE THEFT COST £9.1M**

a 2% reduction in cost, and an 8% reduction in claims



**QUAD AND ATV THEFT COST £2.5M**

a decrease of nearly 18%, returning to 2018 levels



**LIVESTOCK THEFT COST £2.3M**

a reduction of 25%, but up by over a third in the South West

## The cost of rural theft around the UK

Region or country	Cost in 2019	Cost in 2020	% Change from 2019
East	£8.1m	£6.4m	-20.5%
Midlands	£10.6m	£7.9m	-25.3%
North East	£8.6m	£7.8m	-9.7%
North West	£3.5m	£3.7m	3.3%
Northern Ireland	£3.3m	£2.1m	-36.9%
Scotland	£2.3m	£1.7m	-25.0%
South East	£8.7m	£7.1m	-18.6%
South West	£6.6m	£5.1m	-23.7%
Wales	£2.6m	£1.6m	-39.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£54.3m</b>	<b>£43.3m</b>	<b>-20.3%</b>

\* Estimates based on NFU Mutual claims statistics, costs rounded to the nearest £100,000.

## The 10 worst affected counties by cost in 2020, based on NFU Mutual claims statistics.

Rank	Region or country	Cost in 2019	Cost in 2020	% Change from 2019
1	Lincolnshire	£2,841,146	£2,479,792	-12.7%
2	Cambridgeshire	£2,028,387	£2,017,744	-0.5%
3	Essex	£2,738,873	£1,650,999	-39.7%
4	Suffolk	£1,445,946	£1,439,629	-0.4%
5	Lancashire	£1,798,116	£1,396,954	-22.3%
6	Kent	£1,825,576	£1,367,251	-25.1%
7	Shropshire	£1,412,222	£1,303,930	-7.7%
8	North Yorkshire	£2,204,567	£1,287,158	-41.6%
9	Hampshire	£1,368,958	£1,240,010	-9.4%
10	Leicestershire	£1,689,554	£1,186,104	-29.8%



# VIEWS FROM THE FIELD



**DC Chris Piggott**  
Agricultural  
and Plant Field  
Intelligence Officer  
National Vehicle  
Crime Intelligence  
Service (NaVCIS)

During the pandemic, NaVCIS saw offenders taking a different approach in their criminality. Whilst vehicle crime was down as a whole and the theft of large machinery reduced significantly, a continuing trend was the targeting of farms for their machinery's specialist GPS equipment and a rise in the theft of smaller items such as quad bikes.

As our borders are starting to flow freely once more, we anticipate that larger machinery theft will again become a prominent issue. This is a trend that is already beginning to emerge, with demand currently outstripping the supply of new machinery due to manufacturing backlogs. NaVCIS and NFU Mutual continue to work closely to support all UK forces, to prevent, pursue and disrupt organised criminality both nationally and internationally.



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

Having had a dedicated rural crime team for eight years in North Wales, we have seen first-hand the impact a theft or a livestock attack can have on a farmer - both financially and emotionally.

Farms can be seen as easy targets to the opportunist or hardened criminal, but by understanding the environment and the criminals' methods, we are striking back. We're utilising the latest technology and providing education to help prevent these offences. We have pioneered Future Farms Cymru as a concept project, and we are now putting it into practice to do even more to prevent crime and catch offenders. There's an array of innovative equipment now available that can prevent crimes like quad bike theft, or even alert homeowners of any sudden drop in their diesel or heating oil storage tanks. We have also championed establishing a brand new livestock act to help prevent dog attacks in our countryside. We are hopeful that can become effective this year.



**Dr Kate Tudor**  
Senior Lecturer  
in Criminology

The reality of rural crime is extremely complex. Whilst some offenders remain fairly unsophisticated, the vast majority of perpetrators are highly skilled and organised.

They also tend to cover large geographical areas and engage with newly emerging technologies in the course of their criminality. Research clearly evidences that rural residents are routinely preyed upon by people who have links to other forms of serious and organised crime and whose offending networks are not only extensive, but often international in nature. Offenders' ability to identify and exploit the weaknesses and vulnerabilities present in rural communities, policing responses and security measures, means that rural offences represent a significant income stream for organised criminals. Consequently, truly effective solutions are dependent on partnership working that is capable of both identifying and challenging this reality.



**Inspector  
Alan Dron**  
National Rural  
Crime  
Co-ordinator  
Police Scotland

Over the past year, SPARC has continued coordinating effective and proactive partnerships utilising holistic, innovative and specialist techniques.

We've also sought to strengthen cross-border working, to further reduce opportunities for individuals intent on causing the greatest threat, risk or harm to rural communities. In conjunction with Northumbria, Cumbria and County Durham Constabularies, Police Scotland formed 'Operation Hawkeye' designed to target transient criminals who focus their activities particularly on crossing national, local authority and policing boundaries. This produced evidence that many of those committing significant amounts of rural crime throughout Scotland, including ATM theft, acts of violence and high value crimes, originate from the North East of England, and are frequently associating with or connected to each other.



**Stuart Roberts**  
NFU Deputy  
President

Rural crime continues to be a huge issue and its impact on farmers and growers is enormous. It also has far-reaching impacts on rural communities and our landscapes too.

Importantly, it's not just farmers that want action. It's the public too. This was clearly demonstrated during the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May when more than 50,000 people signed an open letter demanding action to tackle fly-tipping, and a further 19,000 supported changes to legislation to prevent dog attacks on farm animals. What's clear to me is that the election of new Police and Crime Commissioners can act as a reset moment, where they prioritise tackling rural crime and commit to levelling up policing for both urban and rural areas to create a safer, cleaner and greener rural Britain.



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

Police Service of NI is committed to driving down rural crime. However while it is encouraging that there was a fall of over 24% in the number of incidents for the 12 months to 31st March 2021, continuing the downward trend, 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 communities and the Rural Crime Partnership (RCP) to combat and deter criminals. Working collaboratively means we can respond to emerging crime trends. RCP fosters working partnerships between rural stakeholders, including Department of Justice, the Ulster Farmers' Union, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, NFU Mutual, Federation of Small Businesses, and the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster. We also work with Police and Community Safety Partnerships and An Gardaí Siochanna in the Republic of Ireland.

# 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 over 300 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. Tackling rural crime, making farming safer, supporting rural initiatives across the UK and helping to look after the environment are just some of the ways we do that.

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



Facebook: NFU Mutual



Linkedin: 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 would like this document in large print,  
braille or audio, please contact us on 01789 416 113**

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-0821