

Farmers Can Take Precautions To Prevent Farm Equipment Theft

LEXINGTON, KY.

Equipment and tools are valuable to any farming operation. They allow farmers to do jobs easier and quicker and many times, are costly investments. Recently, they've become attractive targets to thieves across the state.

Kenny Perry and Tad Campbell, who are University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service agents in Graves and Mason counties, respectively, said thefts of farm equipment and tools have increased in the past 12 to 18 months in their counties. They attribute this to the high price of scrap metal and copper along with a down economy, among other factors.

"Thieves seem to be looking for any kind of a small mechanical device, such as an air compressor, generator or welder, that they can take and quickly sell to whomever," said Perry, agriculture and natural resources extension agent. "During harvest a lot of equipment is left in fields away from a farmer's home, and that makes it an easy target for folks to come in and get what they can off of it."

In Mason County, many thefts have been on properties with abandoned homes or absentee owners, said Campbell, agriculture and natural resources extension agent. With many farmers also balancing off-farm jobs too, equipment can be stolen while they're away, sometimes in the middle of the day. In both situations, he said it is beneficial for farmers to develop relationships with neighbors, so they can watch after each other's property.

"It seems like thieves perceive thefts on farms to be a little less risky than going into someone's home because of farms' rural locations," Campbell said. "Anything producers can do to ward off thieves or make it more difficult for them to get or steal equipment could help deter thefts."

These are not isolated incidents. Law enforcement agencies across the state reported a total of 770 crimes involving farm equipment to the Kentucky State Police data base in 2010.

Farm equipment and tools, both large and small, are potential targets for thieves. The following precautions could help farmers protect their equipment:

- Keep valuable equipment and tools in a secure facility.
- Lock equipment with cabs, barn doors, sheds, toolboxes and other on-farm facilities after use.
- Purchase locks for buildings that don't have locks or block their entrances.
- Never leave keys to equipment or buildings on or near them, as thieves may easily find them.
- Close gates after leaving the property.
- Take inventory, including photos, descriptions and any identifying numbers, of all tools and equipment.
- Don't leave equipment in fields overnight if possible. If unavoidable, make sure the equipment is parked away from the road; immobilize the machinery by removing the battery, distributor cap or rotor. Chain and lock the front wheels together and/or to a stationary object, such as a tree.
- Develop a watch system with neighbors so everyone is on the lookout for suspicious activity in the area.
- Report any suspicious activity to the proper authorities.
- Keep large or expensive equipment at a location within sight of home.
- Use lockable fuel caps on machinery, and lock bulk fuel tanks.
- Purchasing security cameras or alarm systems are also possibilities. Δ



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