



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# Rural Crime incidence – Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions

## 1 Background and challenges

This briefing note quantifies the scale of rural crime within Northern Ireland and other neighbouring jurisdictions.

The issue of rural crime has grown in the public consciousness in recent years within Northern Ireland with incidents such as thefts of animals, machinery and burglaries/robberies from rural residents featuring regularly in the local news. The recent report published by the insurer NFU Mutual and titled *Crime in the Countryside 2011* highlighted what appeared to be a growth in crimes affecting the farming community across the UK.

One of the major challenges faced by the researcher in preparing this briefing note was the fact that there is no commonly used definition of what constitutes 'rural' in relation to crime statistics. By way of example, the PSNI can provide statistics by police region (Urban = greater Belfast and Rural = rest of Northern Ireland) but there is no real 'rural' disaggregation beyond this level. As a result many of the police forces contacted

across the UK were unable to provide rural crime figures and in those instances where the figures are available it made different police force statistics impossible to compare.

As a further complication, there is some debate around what the term rural crime actually covers. Is it for example any crime committed within a rural community or does it only relate to particular crimes such as livestock or machinery theft which tend to occur on farms/farm dwellings?

Whilst some police forces collect data on the type of crime (e.g. livestock theft or agricultural machinery theft), others identify the location where the crime occurred (e.g. farmland, outhouse/shed or yard). The lack of a consistent approach here has provided a challenge in terms of data collection and raises some concerns as to how accurate any data can be.

In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, a particular obstacle to data collection from police forces within England, Scotland and Wales has been the fact that the data being sought has not existed centrally (i.e. Home Office) but has required separate Freedom of Information requests to be made to each police force.

## 2 Agreed approach

In response to the above challenges, and in an effort to standardise the data collected, the following assumptions were made in relation to data requested from police forces throughout the UK and Ireland. Rural crimes were defined either as:

- theft of farm equipment/machinery or livestock where available;
- or
- theft/burglary where the location of the crime was recorded as farm premises, farmland or premises often associated with farms such as outhouses/sheds or yards where available.

On this basis data requests were made to the PSNI and An Garda Síochána. In relation to GB police forces, requests for data were sent as follows:

- Wales – North Wales, Dyfed, South Wales and Gwent;
- Scotland – Fife, Dumfries and Galloway, Grampian, Strathclyde, Tayside, Lothian and Borders, and Northern; and
- England – Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Devon and Cornwall, Avon and Somerset, Norfolk and West Mercia – all areas with significant rural populations.

## 3 Northern Ireland

In terms of specific crimes the PSNI does not specifically identify thefts of livestock or machinery. Thefts like this are recorded as broader thefts but the PSNI do try to identify those that might be farm related on an ad hoc basis through various other details

associated with the incident (e.g. where stolen property is listed as farm machinery or farm livestock).

Taking these caveats into account the following table highlights the number of recorded burglaries, robberies and thefts within Northern Ireland where the stolen property was farm equipment or livestock.

Year	Number of recorded offences
2007/08	66
2008/09	69
2009/10	117
2010/11	137
1 <sup>st</sup> Apr – 30 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2011* (figures for 2011/12 are provisional)	31

Table 1: Recorded burglary, robbery and theft offences where the stolen property is farm equipment or livestock<sup>2</sup> Source: Central Statistics Unit, PSNI

It should be remembered that these figures are unlikely to include all thefts, robberies or burglaries involving farm equipment or livestock due to the vagaries of the crime recording system. Nonetheless the figures do reveal that from 2007/8 up to the end of 2010/11 there has been an apparent 108% increase in the number of recorded offences.

#### 4 Ireland

An Garda Síochána crime data is available at group level (based on the Irish Crime Classification System publications) for Garda Regions / Divisions, and certain other data is available at Garda District / Station level. However these categories do not necessarily fall into a definite rural / urban divide.

The location of certain crimes (thefts/burglaries in particular) can be determined – e.g. where location is 'Farmland', 'Yard' or 'Outhouse/Shed'. However it is important to note that 'Yard' may not necessarily mean 'Farmyard' and equally 'Outhouse/Shed' may not be on a farm or even in a rural area. The available statistics are also unable to determine the actual objects taken in thefts / burglaries, but are rather disaggregated as vehicles or other property.

Location Type	Incident Type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 (up to the end of June)
Farmland	0811 Theft	14	25	32	36	20

<sup>1</sup> Farm equipment includes agricultural machine, tractor, harvester or other.

<sup>2</sup> Livestock includes cattle, poultry, sheep and pigs.

	unauthorised taking of vehicle 0826 Theft of other property	157	191	196	236	101
Outhouse/Shed	0811 Theft unauthorised taking of vehicle 0826 Theft of other property	17 229	57 428	71 701	86 743	39 409
Yard	0811 Theft unauthorised taking of vehicle 0826 Theft of other property	264 1097	341 1478	552 1700	508 2201	250 1306

Table 2: Selected thefts by location from 2007 to 30th June 2011.

Source: Central Statistics Office Ireland

In relation to theft of other property from farmland there has been a 50% in recorded crime between 2007 and 2010, whilst in the same period theft/unauthorised taking of a vehicle has increased by 157%. In overall terms, thefts from farmland increased by 59% between 2007 and 2010.

Whilst the data for thefts from outhouses and yards cannot be directly determined as either rural or farm based the trend has also been upwards in terms of reported crime between 2007 and 2010. Theft/unauthorised taking of a vehicle from an outhouse/shed increased by 405% in this period, whilst theft of other property increased by 224%. With regard to yards the theft/unauthorised taking of a vehicle increased by 92% between 2007 and 2010, whilst thefts of other property increased by 100%.

## 5 GB

Having contacted the previously outlined police forces for data it is clear that all of the forces contacted do not currently hold this data in an accessible format, and that accessing this data, if it existed, would require the submission of a formal Freedom of Information (FOI) request, which if successful would take up to 20 days under the auspices of the Freedom of Information Act<sup>3</sup>. Given these circumstances a formal FOI request has been submitted to each of the aforementioned police forces for data.

As things stand the only police force that has provided data is the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary and table 3 below sets out the statistics they have provided.

Fiscal Year	Farm Building	Farm/Cultivated Land	Total crimes at Farms	Percentage of overall crime at farms
2004/05	242	800	1042	0.8%

<sup>3</sup> [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)

2005/06	268	674	942	0.8%
2006/07	218	748	966	0.8%
2007/08	244	698	942	0.8%
2008/09	214	686	900	0.9%
2009/2010	213	603	816	1.0%

Table 3: Number of crimes committed against Farms in Devon and Cornwall per year, 2004-2010.  
Source: Performance and Analysis Department, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary.

It would appear from the data provided that the general trend in crime committed against farms has been downward within Devon and Cornwall, with a 22% decrease in total crimes at farms between 2004 and 2010.

## 6 Next steps

This paper will be updated upon the receipt of further data from GB based police forces.