

THEFT PREVENTION OF HAY THROUGH THE USE OF CONFETTEE

O. W. Hooton
Safety and Agricultural Crime Prevention Officer
California Department of Food and Agriculture

In the past, crime was fundamentally a city phenomenon. In the past 20 years we have seen crime rates increase dramatically in rural areas. Up 200% in the past five years. Today's rural residents find themselves five times more likely of becoming victims of a crime than were their counterparts of the 1960's.

Much of the increase in the rural crime rate has come at the expense of farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses. While exact figures are not available as to the losses experienced through agricultural crime, fragmentary information reveals that the problem is widespread and costly. Agricultural crime is no longer an instance of petty theft here and there. It is now big business.

While there is a wide variety of crime prevention activities undertaken all across the country, it must be realized that the initial responsibility rests with the individual property owner.

The level of security on a farm or ranch can be determined to a large degree, by the individual farmer's or rancher's acceptance of the responsibility in implementing a security program. The key to this is the concern felt by the individual toward the threat of being victimized by a criminal.

Unfortunately, farmers by their very location, often relatively isolated on dark and lonely country roads, present a vulnerable target for thieves and other criminals.

While the suggestions in this material cannot guarantee against loss by theft, if implemented, they stand to reduce the chances of such a loss happening. They provide the concerned farmer or rancher with the means to act against the threat of theft, instead of reacting to loss by theft.

In response to this need, former Attorney General George Deukmejian, in 1981, formed the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force to address these crime problems. Our present Attorney General, John K. Van De Kamp, is in full support of the Task Force's activities.

Studies made by the Task Force determined that proper identification of equipment and produce such as hay would or could do two major things: (1) discourage theft; (2) recover property.

The identification system adopted is called "owner applied number" and is accepted by the National Crime Information Center. This system is used to I.D. farm equipment, grain, seed and hay. The I.D. of equipment is important to this group. However, I will just discuss how it should be used to I.D. hay. The number is composed of 10 characters -- example the first two in California would be CA, the next three is the county number, the next four is the owner's, and the last is the initial of last name -- example -- Smith, then the last would be "S".

The use of the I.D. is as follows: you can secure your number through the local farm bureau or the county sheriff.

The number is now on file with the sheriff department, if your hay or equipment is found in some other county or state, a check with the local sheriff will tell the finder who owns the property.

If your hay is stolen and you report it stolen to the sheriff it will be inserted into the National Crime Information Center system so that a finder running a check will find not only who owns it but will find the property listed as stolen. For hay producers though, the best part is that your hay is recoverable because any policemen stopping a vehicle hauling hay and checking will find a piece of confettee with your number and run a check right on the spot and determine if the one in possession is the owner. Another process goes along with this -- you must give a driver a bill of lading and if sold must issue a bill of sale with the number listed so that a buyer is not stopped and held up at a weigh station or on the highway.