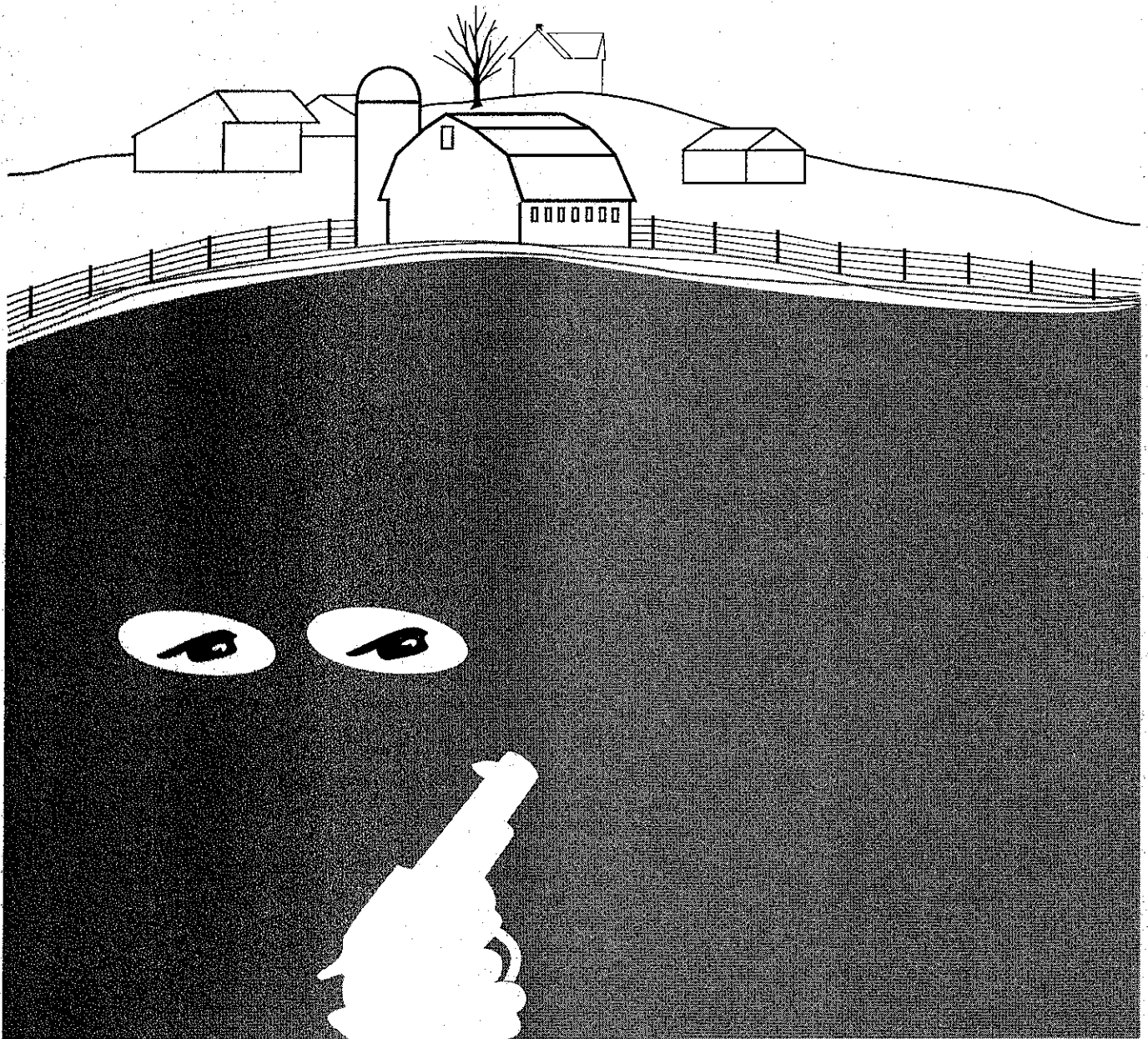


FARM CRIME IN MISSISSIPPI



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Farm Crime in Mississippi

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Farm Crime in Mississippi

Introduction

The pervasiveness and seriousness of farm vandalism and crime in Mississippi are not known. Although some farm vandalism and farm crimes are reported, many are not and, therefore, do not find their way into official statistics such as the Uniform Crime Reports (Cleland, 1990). Because there is little information about crime and vandalism on farms in the South, a group of southern rural sociologists joined to initiate a regional research project to examine farm crime in the South. This project is designated Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS) Regional Research Project S-193.

Although Mississippi dropped out of the project before the data collection began, we assisted in obtaining a random sample of farmers who were policyholders of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Insurance Company. We also helped in various phases of the data collection, which was primarily done at Auburn University.

Coding and data preparation for Mississippi was all done at Auburn. The data were collected using a mail questionnaire. The first mailing was followed by a second mailing to those not responding the first time. Because of budget constraints, a third mailing was not done.

The Mississippi data set only includes 144 respondents who said they were farming at least one acre of land in 1989. Farmers who carry insurance against vandalism and crime may not accurately represent all farm operators (Cleland, 1990) in Mississippi. Thus, these results must be generalized with caution and viewed as preliminary. Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station scientists are planning a more extensive telephone survey of a simple random sample of farmers in the Mississippi during the winter of 1992 or early in 1993.

This bulletin focuses on the major results for the farm operators in the State of Mississippi.

Demographic Characteristics of Farms and Farm Operators

Farms

Respondents were asked general questions about their farms in order to better understand farm crime and vandalism experiences. Fifty-six percent of the respondents farmed at least 150 acres. The average

number of acres owned was 345 and the mean number leased was 210 acres. When asked how many separate tracts of land they own or operate, 54% stated two or more. The average respondent had been farming for 24 years.

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents live in a house located on one of the tracts they operate, 73% have lived in their current dwelling more than 10 years. Eighty-nine percent of those living on their farm land have some or all of their major farm buildings located within sight of their house. Eighty-three percent of the respondents have most of their farm buildings located within easy access to a paved public road. On the other hand, 58% reported the buildings were not within easy access of an urban center (10,000 or more people).

When asked what kinds of livestock they had in their operation (see Figure 1), 49% said beef cattle. Catfish was the next most common with 15% responding affirmative. Turkeys were the least common with only one response. The most frequent type of crop enterprises (see Figure 2) were hay (39%), timber (30%), and soybeans (29%).

Respondents were asked to provide an estimate of their 1987 gross farm income from the sale of all farm products. About half (49%) of the farm operators reported a gross farm income of less than \$30,000 (see Figure 3).

Farm operators

Respondents were asked background information to help understand differences among farmers relative to their farm victimization experiences. Of the 144

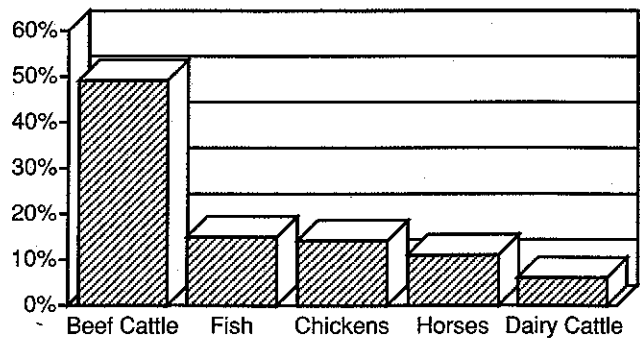


Figure 1. The five most common livestock enterprises reported by Mississippi respondents.

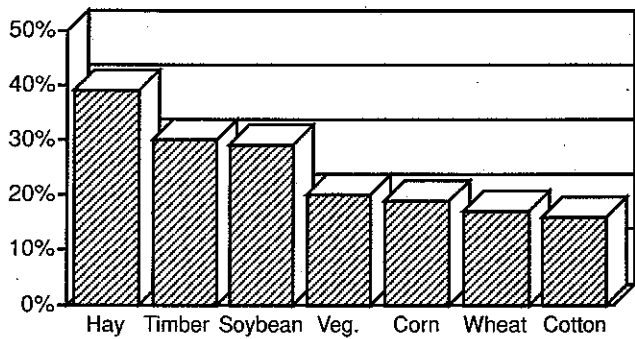


Figure 2. The seven most common crops produced by Mississippi respondents.

farm operators in the study, 93% indicated they were male and 97% said they were white. Only 7% of the farm operators were younger than 30 years of age (see Figure 4).

The educational level of the respondents is as follows: 20% have not completed high school, 30% finished high school, 30% have some vocational or college education beyond high school, 16% completed 4 years of college, and 4% completed a graduate or professional degree program. Forty-one percent of the farm operators work part or full-time off the farm. Of the 86% who are married, 44% said their spouses work part-time or full-time off the farm. When asked about members in their household, 23% reported one or more children under age 12, and 29% had one or more children between 12 and 19 years of age.

A total 1987 household income between \$10,000 and \$39,999 (net farm income plus all income from off

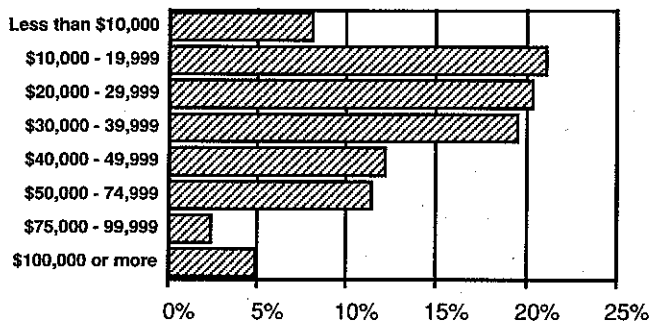


Figure 3. Estimated 1987 gross farm income of Mississippi respondents

farm sources) was reported by 61% of the respondents. The average total household income derived from off-farm sources was approximately 45%.

When respondents were asked how far they lived from their county seat, 49% stated one to 10 miles, 40% indicated 11 to 20 miles, and the rest said they are more than 20 miles.

Farm Crime in Mississippi

Opinions on crime and vandalism

Respondents were asked 13 questions about farm crime and vandalism in their local community. Answer alternatives provided for these questions were: strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree.

Of the 13 areas, 96% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that victims have a duty to report crime to the sheriff. Table 1 indicates that 71% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the courts are too easy on persons convicted of crimes against farms, and that 63% also agreed or strongly agreed that vandalism is more prevalent than it was a few years ago. A majority of respondents worry about damage caused by hunters during the hunting season (62% agreed or strongly agreed).

Most (77%) also reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they worry about the farm when they are away. The statement, "When away from the farm, I can depend on my neighbors to watch my property for me," received 57% agree or strongly agree responses, and 75% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they can go anywhere on the farm safely after dark.

A majority (56%) felt that farm crime has remained

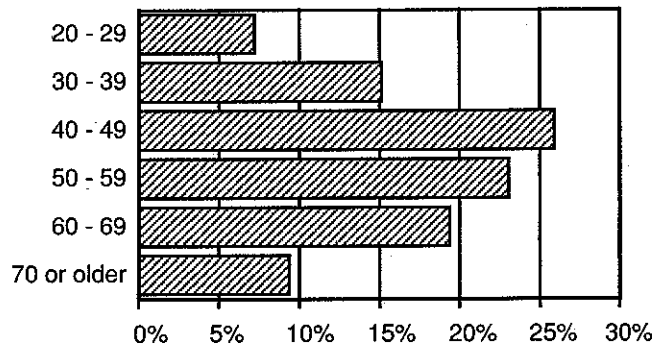


Figure 4. Age distribution of 144 Mississippi farm operators who responded to the survey.

Table 1. Opinions on farm crime and vandalism.

	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Uncertain %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Victims have duty to report crime	0.7	1.4	1.4	57.1	39.3
Courts in county are too easy on criminals	2.8	5.7	20.6	29.8	41.1
When away, I worry about my farm property	0.0	13.7	9.4	54.7	22.3
Vandalism occurs more often than in past	0.0	7.9	29.3	40.7	22.1
I Feel safe on farm after dark	3.6	10.8	10.8	58.3	16.5
I Worry about damaged property by hunters	4.9	24.6	8.5	33.1	28.9
Farm property theft has increased	0.0	14.3	40.7	32.9	12.1
Illegal dumping on farm is a problem	7.1	24.3	17.9	36.4	14.3
When away I can depend on neighbors to watch my farm	4.3	23.6	15.0	45.0	12.1
Farmers should put ID numbers on equipment and machines	9.4	20.1	20.1	36.0	14.4
Local sheriff investigates thoroughly	10.0	20.0	37.1	27.1	5.7
Little can I do to prevent crime on farm	3.6	42.4	12.9	34.5	6.5
Current laws are adequate to protect farm property	9.4	30.9	36.7	19.4	3.6

Total number of farmers = 144

constant during the past 2 years, 40% felt it had increased, and 4% thought it had decreased.

Seriousness of crime

Respondents were asked to give ratings of “not serious, somewhat serious, serious, or no opinion” to 12 crime areas in their community. The area rated as being most serious or somewhat serious was trespassing on farm land (80%). Seventy-seven percent of the farm operators rated poaching as serious or somewhat serious. Burglary (67%) and dumping trash on farm land (64%) were next on the list, followed by vandalism at 59%.

Table 2 indicates about half of the respondents rated arson and theft of parts from farm vehicles or machinery as serious or somewhat serious. On the other hand, about half of the respondents felt that livestock theft or rustling, theft of farm machinery, and marijuana growing by outsiders were not serious crime problems.

Current experience with vandalism

Respondents were asked if they had experienced any vandalism to their property in the last 12 months. Twenty-four percent reported vandalism on their farms; furthermore, 68% of these victims reported more than one occurrence. The three most common types of vandalism were directed at farm buildings, farm fences and gates, and farm machinery.

Respondents reported an average repair or replacement cost of \$1,633 for all incidents of vandalism. Ninety-one percent of those reporting vandalism in the past year said they did not recover the loss from insurance. While 38% reported that they always in-

formed the sheriff of such incidents, 32% said they sometimes informed the sheriff. When respondents were asked if the vandalized property was visible from their house or a neighbor’s house, 55% said it was not.

Current experience with burglary

Eighteen percent of the respondents had experienced one or more burglaries in the past 12 months. Farm buildings other than barns were the most burglarized, followed by farm homes and then barns. Of the 51 incidents, 49% involved other farm buildings, 26% involved farm homes, 25% involved barns.

The cost of repair or replacement of property damaged as a result of burglary varied, the average for barns was the highest (\$5,012), followed by other

Table 2. Perceived seriousness of types of crime.

	Not serious %	Somewhat serious %	Serious %	No Opinion %
Trespassing	17.7	39.7	40.4	2.1
Poaching	20.6	29.8	46.8	2.8
Burglary of farm buildings	25.0	31.4	35.7	7.9
Dumping trash on farm land	32.6	34.0	30.5	2.8
Vandalism	37.1	32.9	26.4	3.6
Arson	46.0	25.5	24.8	3.6
Theft of machinery parts	43.6	23.6	27.9	5.0
Theft of farm machinery	51.4	22.9	19.3	6.4
Livestock theft or rustling	56.4	17.9	16.4	9.3
Growing of marijuana				
by outsiders on farmland	51.1	18.0	18.0	12.9
Sale of misrepresented goods and services to farmers	42.0	23.2	15.9	18.8

Total number of farmers = 144

farm buildings (\$1,601) and then farm houses (\$789). Thirty-seven percent of the victims recovered some loss through insurance claims for house burglaries, 20% for other farm building burglaries, and 17% for barn burglaries.

When burglary victims were asked if they informed the sheriff of the incidents, 50% stated that they sometimes reported burglaries to the sheriff, and 33% indicated that they always reported such incidents. Visibility of burglarized buildings from the farm operator's house, a neighbor's house or both varied with 90% of the other farm buildings, 83% of the barns, and 62% of the farm houses being visible.

Current experience with other theft

Farm theft in the past 12 months had been experienced by 22% of the farm operators. Of the 30 incidents, 17% included crops, 13% livestock, 43% farm equipment, and 50% farm materials (gasoline, chemicals, seeds, fertilizers). Twenty-three percent of these victims experienced more than one type of farm theft.

The respondents reported a total of 5 incidents of livestock theft, 8 of crop theft, 22 of farm equipment theft, and 68 of farm material theft. Only two theft occurrences were fully covered by insurance and only three had some of their stolen items insured. The estimated average value of the stolen items was \$383 for livestock theft, \$2,100 for crops, \$1,736 for farm equipment theft, and \$2,907 for farm material.

The farm theft incidents had been reported to the sheriff by 5 respondents all the time and 15 sometimes. When asked about the visibility of the items from the farm house, a neighbor's house or both, 75% of the crop, 58% of the farm equipment, 57% of the farm material, and 33% of the livestock victims said the stolen items were visible.

Previous crime and vandalism experience

When respondents were asked if they had any previous experience with farm crime or vandalism, theft of farm materials received the most responses, with 48% stating they had sometimes or often experienced it. The area with the lowest incidence was theft of other livestock (poultry, horses, hogs, etc.), with only 13% indicating they had experienced this type of theft.

Farm security devices

Farm operators were asked what kinds of security "devices" they use on their farms. The device (of those appropriate for the farm enterprise) least used was alarm systems in buildings, with 3% reporting having them. Devices most respondents reported using in some or all of the areas on their farms were farm

buildings visible to neighbors (73%), outside lights on important buildings (60%), no trespassing and warning signs (60%), locks on barns and other farm buildings (56%), security lights in strategic places (54%), and locks on farm gates (44%). When asked if they had a watch dog, 57% reported they had one. Seventy percent said they had hand guns for protection on their farm.

Protective action

The most common type of protective action was having a neighbor watch the farm while they were away. Our findings indicate that 31% always had a neighbor keep an eye on the place, 17% often had one do so, and 24% stated they sometimes had a neighbor watch their farm. The next most frequent actions reported by 57% of the farm operators were sometimes, often, or always keeping doors on farm buildings locked and keeping a record of the serial numbers on machinery and equipment. On the other hand, 99% of the respondents who grow grain do not put identification confetti in their grain. Ninety-six percent never tattoo bales, sacks, or crates used for crops.

Theft insurance on crops had never been carried by 65% of the respondents growing crops, theft insurance on livestock had never been carried by 56% of the respondents with livestock on their farm.

Seventy-six percent of the respondents also never informed the sheriff when they were going to be away for several days.

Protection expenditures

When respondents were asked if they had spent anything on insurance or security devices in the past 3 years, 80%, responded that they had not. Of those who answered yes to the question, 13% confirmed that they had insurance, 2% had invested in security devices, and 5% had purchased both insurance and security devices.

The estimated annual average cost of insurance to protect against vandalism and theft losses was \$1,980, and the estimated annual average cost of security devices was \$197.

Information on crime prevention

Table 3 shows the sources respondents use to get information about farm crime prevention measures. The most common source of information about crime prevention is the Farm Bureau, with 66% of the respondents reporting it as their source. On the other hand, the least used sources are farm commodity organizations, with 99% reporting that they never used them for such information.

Table 3. Sources for crime prevention information

Source	Percent Using
Farm Bureau	66.3
Friends and neighbors	42.2
Farm magazine	39.8
Police or sheriff	27.7
Newspaper	26.5
Television	25.3
Radio	19.3
County Agricultural Extension	13.3
Total number of farmers = 144	

Law enforcement and crime prevention on Mississippi farms

When rating the quality of protection provided by their sheriff's department, 42% rated it as poor or very poor, 20% as good or very good, and 38% were uncertain about how good it is.

Respondents were asked how fast their sheriff responds to a farmer's call. Thirty-five percent said fast or very fast, while 36% rated their sheriff slow or very slow (29% were uncertain). The effect of increased patrolling by sheriff's deputies was rated effective (or very effective) by 56% of the farm operators.

Stiffer penalties by local judges were rated as effective (or very effective) in reducing crimes against farm property by 78% of the respondents. Comparing their community to other parts of Mississippi, 27% of the respondents felt there was a likely (or very likely) chance that a farm in their area would be a victim of some type of crime in the coming year.

Fear of victimization

Respondents were asked how fearful they are about their farm being victimized in the next year or so (see Table 4), 32% stated they are a good bit or very much fearful about burglary of a farm building, and 37%

Table 4. Fear of farm crime victimization.

	Not at			
	all %	Little %	Good bit %	Very much %
Burglary of farm buildings	14.7	52.9	21.3	11.0
Burglary of farm house	16.7	46.4	21.0	15.9
Livestock theft	43.9	38.6	10.6	6.8
Crop theft	56.7	34.3	6.0	3.0
Farm vehicle theft	26.1	47.0	18.7	8.2
Crop vandalism	60.7	31.9	5.9	1.5
Arson	30.9	38.8	18.0	12.2
Farm fraud	48.1	39.1	9.0	3.8
Total number of farmers = 144				

feel that way about their farm house. Other areas showing concern are fear of arson (30%), farm vehicle theft (27%), livestock theft (17%), and farm fraud (13%).

When respondents were asked if they had ever heard about voluntary neighborhood watch groups, 61% replied yes. When asked if they were aware of any families in their community who had joined together to organize a cooperative group to protect against crime, 25% replied yes. Fewer than 10% of the farm operators said they belong to a neighborhood watch group.

Summary

There are several important findings about farm crime in Mississippi; however because of the small sample, these must be viewed with caution when applying them to all Mississippi farmers. Trespassing on farm land was considered the most serious crime problem, 80% rated it serious or somewhat serious. About one-fourth of the respondents reported vandalism on their farm in the past 12 months. Farm building vandalism was the most common type.

Eighteen percent of the respondents had experienced a burglary in the last 12 months. Other farm thefts were acknowledged by 22% of the farm operators.

While the Farm Bureau was the most used source for farm crime prevention information, only 20% of the farmers said they had spent money on insurance or security devices in the last 3 years. Twenty-one percent of the respondents rated their sheriff's department as good or very good. About one-third of the farmers said they were a good bit or very much fearful that their farm buildings or house would be victimized next year.

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