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Crime Stoppers Victoria Puts a Spotlight on Farm Crime

Crime Stoppers Victoria is urging farmers and rural property owners across the state to speak up about theft on farms.

Launched today, in partnership with Victoria Police, the new campaign *Putting a Spotlight on Farm Crime* aims to increase farm crime reported in Victoria, whether it's stolen livestock, harvested animals, firearms, equipment, tools, or chemicals.

New data released by the Crime Statistics Agency has revealed livestock theft across the state has risen by 2 per cent in the past 12 months, costing rural communities close to \$2,000,000. Despite this staggering figure, underreporting of farm crime remains a widespread problem.

Stella Smith, Chief Executive of Crime Stoppers Victoria, said farm thieves are becoming increasingly sophisticated in how they target victims.

"We're seeing offenders use drones and satellite imagery to spy on rural properties. It doesn't matter if you live in a remote area, with technology criminals can easily find a way to steal from you," Ms Smith said.

A recent study by Dr Alistair Harkness, Co-Director of the Centre for Rural Criminology at the University of New England, identified concerns from farmers that the offender is known and living in a community, and there exists fear of reprisal. Sharing what you know with Crime Stoppers overcomes that fear.

Ms Smith said it is vital farmers and property owners make a report to Crime Stoppers if they've been targeted by criminals or have suspicions farm crime has occurred. Information can be provided anonymously.

"Even the smallest piece of information could assist police with an investigation and help reduce the rate of farm crime in Victoria."

Acting Inspector Emma Bartel, of Victoria Police's Farm Crime Coordination Unit, said: "We take farm crime very seriously."

"It's vital farmers come forward to report any crime and they should know we will investigate it fully. We understand the impact theft of livestock and equipment can have on farmers and their livelihoods.

"We encourage people in rural areas to report any suspicious activity. The information they have might be the piece we need to hold perpetrators to account.

"We also urge farmers to take precautions – a simple measure like a sign on the fence warning would-be trespassers to stay off private property can go a long way to discouraging crime."

The public is also being encouraged to check the authenticity of livestock and second-hand farming equipment before purchasing.

"If you buy livestock or machinery for a steal, it probably is," Ms Smith said.

President of the Victorian Farmers Federation Emma Germano said that rural crime can have a significant and harmful impact on hard-working communities.

"It not only hurts the victim's hip-pocket, but reduces how much they can spend locally, from cafes to hardware stores," Ms Germano said.

To help boost security on rural properties, Crime Stoppers Victoria in conjunction with Victoria Police, has produced new farm gate signs, available to order for free through crimestoppersvic.com.au/farm-crime. Rural property owners are also encouraged to download the Farm Security checklist.

"By using these free resources, farm owners are helping protect themselves and their properties from both organised criminals and opportunistic offenders," Ms Smith said.

Media contact

Lexie Jeuniewicz 0488 987 520 | lexie.jeuniewicz@crimestoppersvic.com.au