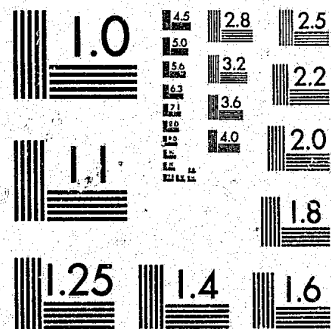


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**FBI** LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

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# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

MAY 1980, VOLUME 49, NUMBER 5

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**William H. Webster, Director**

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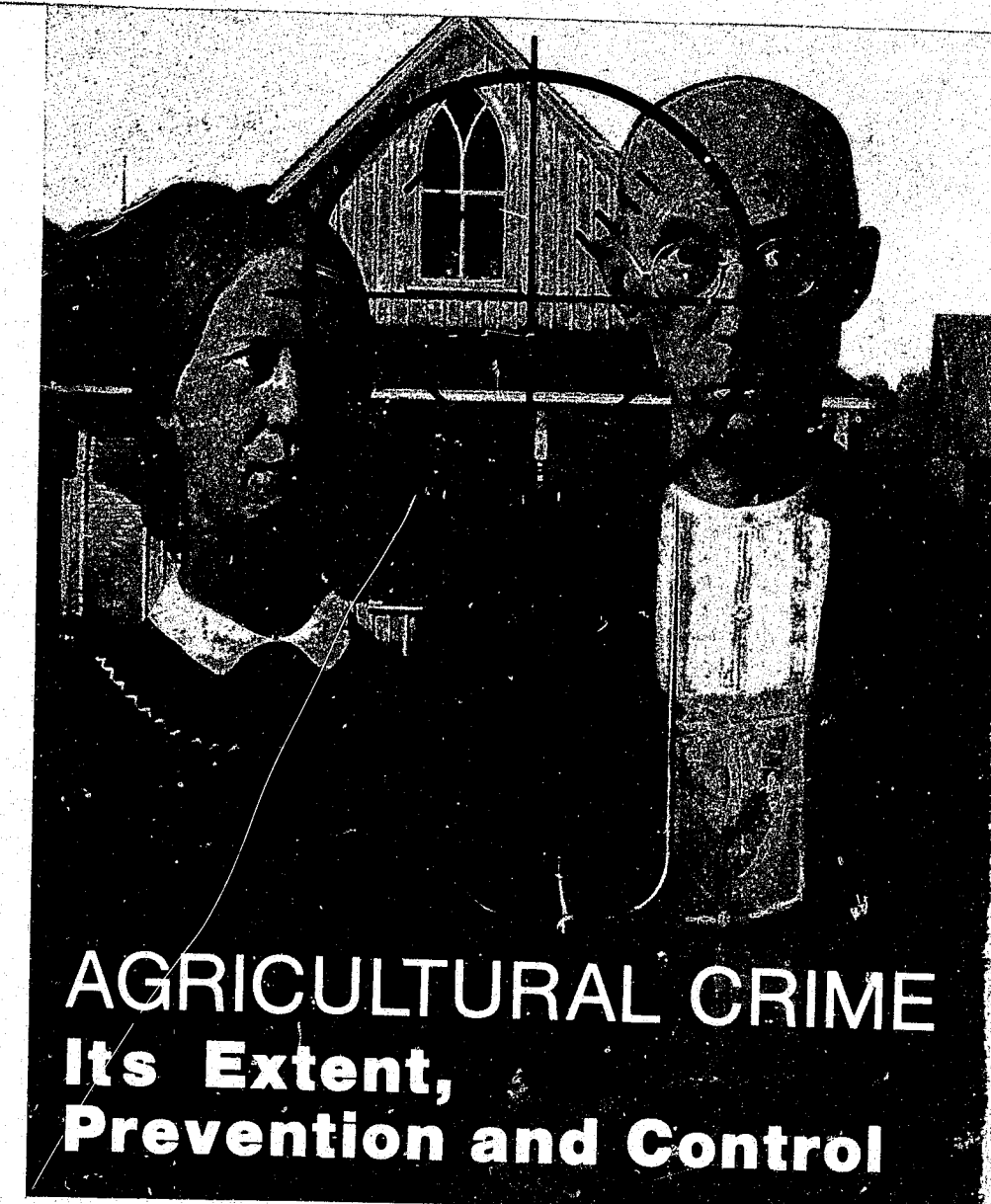


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Crime Problems



## AGRICULTURAL CRIME Its Extent, Prevention and Control

By CHARLES R.  
SWANSON, JR., D.P.A.  
*Institute of Government  
University of Georgia  
Athens, Ga.*

and

LEONARD TERRITO, Ed.D.  
*Department of Criminal Justice  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, Fla.*

A conventional theory is that crime is fundamentally a city phenomenon. The reality of this notion is underscored by the most recent statistics for reported crime which reveal that 30 percent of all serious crimes take place in the 57 cities with populations of 250,000 or more.<sup>1</sup> However, during the past decade, serious rural crime has increased 43 percent over the urban rate. For example, crimes such as the thefts of farm equipment, grain, livestock, lumber, and pesticides are now much more commonplace than they were a decade ago.

Unfortunately, many of the formalized institutions responsible for both training and educating police officers have not paid adequate attention to agricultural crimes. This point is underscored easily. All one has to do is review the curriculum of police academies responsible for training rural police officers to see how much time is devoted to the topic of agricultural crime, check the advertisements for specialized police training courses to see how many devote either an entire course or even a segment of a training course to the investigation and prevention of agricultural crimes, or review police journals and textbooks to see how many articles or sections of text-



Due to differences in orientation, goals, and values of the specialist, he may experience difficulty in communicating with other members of the department. Sarcastic references to "kiddie kops" (juvenile officers), "do-gooders" (community relations officers), or "pencil-pushers" (desk or administrative officers), are not uncommon. Uniformed field patrol officers understandably may not identify with the specialized officers and may not feel a fraternal obligation to share street-acquired knowledge with the specialists. Clearly, the situation also works in the reverse direction, i.e., specialized investigators also withhold information from patrolmen.

Gulick and Urwick consider organization by area to be tertiary or secondary.<sup>19</sup> Division of work by geographical area occurs in all but the very smallest of police departments, however. Most large departments are divided into patrol districts or precincts which are responsible for providing police services to a given area of the city. Precincts may or may not have their own investigative personnel. To the extent that patrol officers and investigators can be assigned within the same geographical boundaries without competing against each other, communications and cooperation can be improved. The mere fact that the patrol officers and investigators are likely to have frequent face-to-face contact encourages exchange of information. Additionally, both the patrol and investigative officers may feel a common responsibility for providing service to the same geographical area. If cotermination of boundaries does not exist, however, geographical organization in itself will have little effect on improving patrol-investigation interaction. A uniformed beat officer may possess enormous amounts of information about an area within his beat boundaries, but if a detective has responsibility for investigating cases throughout the city, it is likely that the investigator will fail to solicit information from the officer which might assist his investigation.

Specialization by area presents many of the same hazards as other forms of specialization. By emphasizing effective and efficient law enforce-

ment in one particular area, an officer may fail to consider the department's overall problems. Crime and criminals seldom restrict themselves to neat geographical boundaries. Whenever a police function is specialized by area, provisions must be made to coordinate the flow of information across intracity and intraorganizational boundaries.

Any agency which operates beyond an 8-hour shift, 5 days a week, must consider coordination by time. Police departments are responsible for effective performances of the law enforcement function 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The same officer who initially investigates an offense may not necessarily be the same officer assigned to the follow-up investigation. In fact, the assigned investigator may be working a different time period than the officer who possesses information relevant to the investigation, complicating the task of communication. While much of the investigator's work must be performed during "business hours" when witnesses, victims, and records are available, some consideration must be given to the need for the investigator to communicate with the officer who made the original report and did the initial investigation. That officer is likely to have intimate knowledge of the area where the offense occurred and of the people who frequent the area. He may even have specific information or ideas relating to the crime under investigation which does not appear on the report. It appears obvious that the reporting patrol officer should be a primary source of information for the investigator. Conversely, the investigator may turn up suspects or descriptions of suspects which would be invaluable to the patrol officer seeking to prevent recurrences of criminal activity on his beat. Yet, due to differences in working hours, the exchange of information may never occur.

Division of labor by time further complicates coordination, because a supervisor who is responsible for a

given function or area cannot always be physically present to direct activities of subordinates or to act as a facilitator for inter and intragroup communications. If duty hours prevent face-to-face communication between officers, information exchange must depend on written reports or relay by a third person. Neither of these forms of communication is as effective as personal dialogue.

In summary, a police agency which is solely dependent on the classical form of organization limits development of critically needed channels for lateral communication between patrol officers and investigative specialists. As each specialized subunit is created, additional communication problems develop. Subunits are likely to become preoccupied with their own objectives instead of working toward the agency's overall goals, they may fail to volunteer assistance and information to another subunit, or even worse, they may deliberately frustrate efforts of competing subunits. **FBI**

(Continued next month)

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Chester I. Bernard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> "The Missouri Crime Survey" (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1926), pp. 46-47; in *Task Force Report: The Police* (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Public Administration Services of Chicago, "Police and Fire Services in Meriden, Conn., (Chicago, Ill.: Public Administration Service, 1962), p. 36; in *Task Force Report: The Police*, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Egon Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society* (Chevy Chase, Md.: National Institute of Mental Health, Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency, 1970), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Niederhofer, *Behind the Shield: The Police in Urban Society* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 58; in James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, pp. 16-56.

<sup>7</sup> *Task Force Report: The Police*, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Warren G. Bennis, *Changing Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), pp. 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, pp. 16-53.

<sup>10</sup> Bittner, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> John C. Buechner, *Public Administration* (Belmont, Calif.: Dickinson Publishing Co., 1968), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Jay Galbraith, *Designing Complex Organizations* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Luther Gulick and L. Urwick, *Papers on the Science of Administration* (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1937).

<sup>16</sup> *Municipal Police Administration*, Esther M. and George D. Eastman, ed., (International City Management Association, 1971), ch. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Gulick and Urwick.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

books are devoted to this topic. What one quickly discovers is that little attention has been paid to this serious and surprisingly costly category of crime.

#### Some Dimensions of Agri-Crime

Vandalism to and thefts of farm products and equipment is a problem which can be illustrated throughout the country. In Dade County, Fla., the value of avocado, lime, and mango fruit stolen annually is \$1 million,<sup>2</sup> and authorities in that State calculate thefts of property in rural areas to be \$21 million per year.<sup>3</sup> A representative of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation asserts that organized crime is moving into the rural areas, and a Florida State representative maintains that organized crime is already heavily into agriculture.<sup>4</sup> The experience of three other States supports this theory. Persons alleged to have ties to a New York City organized crime family apparently defaulted on payments to a group of Wisconsin dairy farmers, and in Indiana, this same group apparently defaulted on payments to a farmer's cooperative. Altogether, these groups were hit with losses of \$1,350,000.<sup>5</sup> In South Dakota, the attorney general was successful in obtaining a grant to investigate organized criminal activity in multistate grain frauds.<sup>6</sup>

The California experience echoes that of Florida. The California Farm Bureau estimates annual farm losses due to theft at \$30 million,<sup>7</sup> and in a single county of that State, irrigation equipment valued at nearly \$1 million has been stolen during the past 2 years.<sup>8</sup> California's incidents of rustling increased 79 percent in 1976, but that increase was exceeded by New Mexico's devastating 300-percent increase in 1978. Other types of farm animals are also routinely stolen. For example, an Iowa farmer relates that while he was hospitalized, thieves not only took 25 of his hogs but also used his pickup truck to transport them.<sup>9</sup> In one Indiana county, the value of hogs stolen in a single year reached nearly \$200,000,<sup>10</sup> and one prominent North Carolina dirt feeder estimated his losses to be tens of thousands of dollars each year.<sup>11</sup>

Normally conceived of as a place suitable for undisturbed reflection, our forests even are becoming places of crime. Timber losses in western Washington have been reported to run \$1 million annually, and it is estimated that 70 percent of the vandalism to and thefts of timber go unreported<sup>12</sup> in that State. In some Iowa State parks, including Des Moines' Grandview Park, thefts of trees have been a problem,<sup>13</sup> and in Illinois, 90 percent of tree thefts are believed to be unreported.<sup>14</sup>

Fires of an incendiary origin are a problem across the Nation. In 1976, fires of this type produced losses of \$11 million in national forest protection areas.<sup>15</sup> Individual States have the same problem. In 1977, 3,914 fires of an incendiary origin resulted in the burning of 25,388 acres<sup>16</sup> in Georgia.

It has been estimated that pesticide thefts exceed \$2 million each year, and in recent years, organized crime rings have struck pesticide distributors in Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana.<sup>17</sup> The CIBA Agricultural Corp., was one of the first to be burglarized when thieves took sizable quantities of Cotoran herbicide from its warehouses. One owner, who was the victim of a burglary, commented, "This isn't any helter-skelter operation. Those men knew our simazine inventory within 100 pounds, they were accurate on our Treflan inventory, and knew just about everything we had in stock. Why, they even knew the lot numbers. They also knew when our police patrolled the area and who was on duty. It was organized. They drive expensive cars equipped to monitor police radio broadcasts. They bring in semi-trucks to take away the pesticides."



Dr. Swanson



Dr. Territo



The sheriff of Washington County, Miss., investigated a pesticide burglary ring which operated for over 2 years, netting one member \$30,000 in black-market sales.<sup>18</sup>

The FBI reports that between 1976 and 1978, more than 70,000 stolen cars, trucks, earthmovers, and farm tractors were not recovered.<sup>19</sup> One informant estimated, based on experience, that it takes about 4 minutes for tractor thieves to invade either a dealership's lot or a farm, start up a tractor, load it on a truck, and drive away.<sup>20</sup> According to the informant, the gang would case the premises before the theft, and immediately after stealing the equipment, would deliver it directly to the customer who had earlier placed an order. A single theft ring operating in four Southeastern States is credited with stealing some \$400,000 in farm equipment in the past 2 years.<sup>21</sup> In Georgia, losses due to theft of farm equipment, chemicals, seeds, and livestock exceeded \$300,000 during the first 5 months of 1978.<sup>22</sup> Several years ago, local, State and Federal law enforcement officials in northern Florida confiscated \$370,000 worth of stolen farm and industrial equipment, trucks, trailers, and other goods as a result of five raids and other confiscations.<sup>23</sup> These raids were conducted by Agents of the FBI, the U.S. Treasury Department, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Division, The Florida State Department of Criminal Law Enforcement, and the Sheriffs of Florida's Washington and Holmes Counties. According to officials, the majority of equipment came from Alabama, but items stolen in Arkansas and Florida were also identified. Many of the identifying numbers and plates on the equipment had been filed off, acid-defaced, or removed; however, some of the numbers were restored by identification restoration techniques.

There is reason to believe that some of the stolen equipment was being readied for shipment to Central and South America and that some had already been shipped.<sup>24</sup>

Other groups that have experienced problems are poultry ranchers, grain farmers, and beekeepers, who have experienced the theft of entire colonies.

How serious is the problem? One survey of 477 Iowa farmers revealed that 80 percent had been victims of theft during the past 3 years.<sup>25</sup> How big is the economic impact of crimes against agriculture? Answering that question is difficult since not all of the figures reported here were for the same year, some of the figures were estimates, and there is a general lack of information in this area. If \$65 million—a conservative estimate—in reported vandalism, fraud, arson, and theft is 3 percent of the problem, and if agri-crime is only 25-percent underreported, then a direct loss figure of approximately \$3 billion is obtained. This figure excludes the indirect costs of agri-crime, such as the higher prices ultimately paid by consumers. By comparison, arson, a current national crime, produced annual losses of \$1.1 billion in 1975.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the direct and indirect costs of crimes against agriculture, there may be certain social costs as well. The amount of land farmed by Blacks is decreasing by 200,000 acres per year.<sup>27</sup> Although the decline is probably due to the interplay of many factors, it is reasonable to speculate that crime may be among the factors leading to the Black population's increasing underrepresentation among the Nation's farmers.

### Crime Control and Prevention Efforts

There are a variety of crime control and prevention efforts underway in the various States. However, despite the fine work and cooperation of some groups and agencies, these efforts are somewhat disjointed, and there appears to be a certain amount of "reinventing the wheel" as different figures and organizations grapple with the issue. In balance, while this diversity perspective may produce some "wheel-spinning," it also offers the opportunity for the development of innovative responses.

A sampling of projects reinforces the notion of a diversity perspective. Aided by funds from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, police agencies in States such as New Hampshire, Arizona, Ohio, California, Kentucky, Oregon, Louisiana, and Montana have strengthened their patrol of rural areas and entered into cooperative arrangements to combat particular types of agri-crime.

The theft of cattle, swine, and other animals poses difficult problems. Several animals may be taken in less than 10 minutes in a one-time opportunistic theft. Alternately, organized thieves may spend weeks—using helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and trucks and walking the ground dressed as hunters or fishermen—to plan raids in which large numbers of animals are taken, often to be sold and butchered within hours of their disappearance. With an eye to preventing losses, the following steps should be of assistance:

- 1) A permanent brand, tattoo, or other similar marking system is essential for the identification of livestock. The marking should be distinctive and applied to stock soon after birth. Electronic identification may be emerging as an alternative to traditional identification schemes. Researchers at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory (LASL) in New Mexico have field tested an identification and temperature monitoring system. A small electronic transponder is implanted

under the animal's hide. Micro-waves from a pistol-shaped gun activate it and provide a reading of the animal's unique identification number and temperature. This system has 3 digits for identification, but LASL scientists believe it can handle up to 15.<sup>28</sup>

- 2) Signs should be conspicuously posted around the property indicating that all animals are permanently branded.
- 3) Whenever possible, livestock should be counted on a daily basis. It has been estimated by law enforcement officials that more than 80 percent of livestock thefts occur away from buildings in isolated pastures or feedlots.
- 4) Predictable absences should be avoided, and when away, neighbors should be requested to check the property.
- 5) Fences and gates should be checked on a regular basis. Good fences and closed gates prevent strays that are especially vulnerable to opportunistic livestock thieves. Gates leading to outlying corrals and loading chutes should also be locked, with chains being used across roads leading to these areas.
- 6) Law enforcement officials should encourage farmers and ranchers to report missing stock immediately. It has been estimated that 35 to 40 percent of all livestock thefts are never reported and less than half are reported promptly.

In terms of other activities, Florida nurserymen are known to have formed vigilante groups to counter thefts of their products, a rustling information clearinghouse has been established by the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, the Western State Livestock Association has developed a uniform system for marking tack, and the Kansas Sheriffs' Association has been active in promoting crime awareness and crime prevention.

Several States, including Kansas, Iowa, and Georgia, have implemented farm equipment marking programs. In the latter State, a consortium of organizations—the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Sheriffs' Association, and the State Farm Bureau—has been particularly cooperative and active in this regard.

An often overlooked aid is the International Association of Chiefs of Police's *Tractor Identification Manual*, an investigative aid that is intended to be of assistance in identifying stolen and recovered agricultural and industrial tractors of over 20-engine horsepower and to facilitate the correct entry of data on stolen tractors into the National Crime Information Center. This manual is useful in the unique identification of tractors distributed by seven major manufacturers in the United States through the use of identification numbers affixed by the manufacturer. More than one number is usually required for a unique identification. These numbers may include, in addition to the unit or tractor serial number, the model number, engine number, transmission number, axle number, rear-housing number, and cab number. While the numbers that are required vary for each manufacturer, in most cases, a combination of two or more of these numbers will provide a unique identification. Each section of the manual includes the procedures for identifying a particular stolen or recovered tractor, the manufacturer's capability for tracing the original purchaser of a tractor, and in cases where the identification numbers are known, the correct procedure for locating these numbers. Each section also contains the name of a manufacturer's representative who may be contacted to help in the investigation or in any problems that may arise regarding a particular product or case. Some manufacturers also maintain lists of stolen equipment for distribution to service centers and/or dealers and wish to be notified of thefts through the listed contact.

Like many of the other targets of thefts from farms, grain is easy to obtain, readily converted to cases, difficult to identify, and vulnerable, since it is frequently sorted in bins away from the house or even temporarily dumped on the ground. One North Dakota sheriff reported that thieves, using a 2-ton pickup truck and portable elevator, were stealing a few hundred bushels at each of many different farms, and the thefts went unnoticed by the farmers. A special commercial product is available to help the farmer lessen the chance of being a crime victim. One company is marketing uniquely numbered confetti to mix with grain to reduce the desirability of stealing it and to make it more difficult to dispose of immediately. Each piece of confetti has on it the code number assigned to a particular grower. For example, 46-20-040 would be identified in the following way:

46=the State of North Dakota  
20=the County of Griggs  
040=the producer, the B & W Ranch

If grain theft is prevalent in an area, law enforcement officials in that area should initiate the implementation of a grain identification program. Additionally, encouraging farmers to use protected areas for storage and requirements establishing the identity and legitimacy of grain sellers should be considered.

### Recommendations

The following are actions that should be undertaken immediately:

- 1) Police academies that provide training for rural law enforcement officers should be certain that the topic of agricultural crime, its investigation and prevention are made a regular part of the academic curriculum. Such information would also be quite useful to municipal police officers, who work in those parts of the country with large agricultural areas.



- 2) Individuals who write police science textbooks, especially those in criminal investigation, should include material in their books that address the investigation and prevention of agricultural crimes. These books are frequently used as references in police academies or as required textbooks in college courses, and as a result, provide a good opportunity for positive exposure to such offenses.
- 3) Police training institutions that offer specialized police seminars to a regional or nationwide law enforcement constituency should give consideration to adding courses that address the special problems of agricultural crime.
- 4) Regional and statewide sources of agricultural crime information should be developed. This information should be analyzed and disseminated to law enforcement agencies, especially if it appears that crime patterns are developing that may have some investigative or predictive use. Fluctuations in market conditions should also be monitored as a means of crime forecasting. For example, strong upward shifts in beef prices may signal the onset of a wave of rustling.

## Conclusion

Our thinking suffers from a conceptual myopia that defines crime and the attending responses in terms of the urban setting. It is clear the agricultural enterprise is an important one, it is vulnerable, and great losses are being experienced. In addition, agricultural crime is not just a problem of rural agencies and State police or State investigative agencies. City dwellers provide some of the "brain power" that develops agri-crime, contribute to the labor pool which executes these plans, and operate some of the networks that dispose of whatever is stolen. Some of what can be done is being done, and despite our overall characterization of efforts as being disjointed, we have also illustrated a few of the programs about which we can feel good. However, in attention, thinking, and programs, we are still in our infancy. Sensitivity to the problem must be developed, researchers must have their interest aroused, studies must be undertaken, training conducted, and special programs implemented and evaluated. Many questions abound and need to be answered. How much of what types of agri-crime is there? How much agri-crime is reported? Are rural investigators actually gathering physical evidence? Which existing crime prevention efforts are most applicable and how do we diffuse them to the rural environment? What types of totally new crime prevention programs need to be developed? Can typologies of agri-crime offenses and offenders be developed? How sensitive are prosecutors to the problem? What appreciation do urban investigative agencies have with respect to their place in the network? What new patterns of inter-agency cooperation are most likely to have impact on the problem? And one last question: What are you going to do?

**FBI**

*The University of Georgia has submitted a grant application, a workplan that provides for a national study of agri-crime. For information contact C. R. Swanson, Institute of Government, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. 30601.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>This percentage was computed from data contained in the FBI's *Crime in the United States—1978*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), Table 14, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Burnside, "It's Time to be Tough on Agricultural Theft," *The Miami (Florida) Herald*, October 21, 1979, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Personal letter of February 15, 1978, from Dennis E. Emmerson, Assistant to the President, Florida Farm Bureau Federation to Mr. Brent Hampton.

<sup>4</sup>Jim Fisher, "Crime in Agriculture," *The Citrus Industry*, vol. 58, No. 1, January 1978, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Cathy Sherman Machan, "The Mafia Nibbles Cheese," *Farm Journal*, September 1976, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>South Dakota State Planning Agency grant No. 2-07-01-002, awarded January 1, 1974.

<sup>7</sup>Jerrold F. Footlick, Paul Brinkly-Rogers, and Chris Harper, "Crime on the Farm," *Newsweek*, October 3, 1977, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>9</sup>Al Morrow, "Theft is Leading Crime in County," *Wallace's Farmer*, October 23, 1976, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>John Russell, "Stamp Out Hog Rustling," *Hog*, September 1976, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>12</sup>Robert P. Mathews, "Theft and Vandalism in Western Washington Forests," *Journal of Forestry*, vol. 68, No. 7, 1970, pp. 415-416.

<sup>13</sup>B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "Tree Rustlers Ride the Plains," *New York Times*, November 10, 1971.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>15</sup>Personal letter and attachments of March 15, 1978, from William L. Rice to C. R. Swanson.

<sup>16</sup>Personal letter and attachments of February 16, 1978, from James C. Turner, Jr., to Bill Sigmon.

<sup>17</sup>*Farm Chemicals*, May 1970, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup>*Agri-News*, October 1975, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>"Thieves Reap Crop of Tractors," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 25, 1978, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup>John Green, "Gone in Four Minutes," *Implement and Tractor*, vol. 92, No. 14, June 21, 1977, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup>"Thieves Reap Crop of Tractors."

<sup>22</sup>Carole Ashkinzai, "Georgia ID Program Aims at Cutting Equipment Thefts," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 7, 1978, p. A-1.

<sup>23</sup>Charlie Cape, "Equipment Theft—Who'll Be Hit Next," *Implement and Tractor*, vol. 90, No. 11, August 7, 1975, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*  
<sup>25</sup>Bob Dunway, "Theft is a Big Problem on Farms," *Wallace's Farmer*, February 23, 1974, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup>*The New York Times*, January 2, 1977, p. F-15.

<sup>27</sup>Tina McElroy Ansa, "Black Farmers Face Struggle for Survival," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 20, 1978, p. B-1.

<sup>28</sup>Russell, p. 27.

# END