CRIME IN RURAL AUSTRALIA

13 per cent of farms were victims of crime in 2001-02

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In recent years, rural crime has received increasing publicity, emphasising the need to better understand the nature of crime on farms. In 2002 the Australian Institute of Criminology commissioned ABARE to undertake a survey supplementary to the broadacre and dairy industries surveys to provide information on the incidence and cost of crimes on farms. This was the second survey in a two year program.

From a common set of crimes across the two years, the proportion of farms experiencing some form of crime marginally decreased — from 15 per cent in 2000-01 (ABARE 2002) to 13 per cent in 2001-02 (table 1). Livestock theft was the most common crime in 2001-02, reported by 6 per cent of farmers. While this is down from 2000-01, the average value of each theft rose slightly, possibly reflecting the higher livestock prices in 2001-02 (Hooper, Blias and Ashton 2003).

The incidence of damage or vandalism to dwellings remained low, at 3 per cent of farms in 2001-02, with an average cost of around $2 200 per farm.

The survey also showed that farms in more accessible areas have a higher incidence of crime than farms in remote areas. Farms in the more accessible areas reported a greater incidence of property damage or vandalism than any other crime, while farms in the more remote areas were more likely to experience livestock theft than any other crime.

Just under half of all farm crimes in 2001-02 were reported to police — slightly more than for 2000-01, with reporting of livestock theft in particular increasing. The most common reason that farmers did not report crime to police was that they believed the police could do nothing or that they lacked proof (37 per cent). This was closely followed by the belief that the crime was not serious enough (17 per cent).

Additionally, the supplementary survey also collected information on the reoccurrence of crimes, insurance coverage of the crime and the financial impact of the loss to the farm.

References