

38

## Rurality, Rural Crime, and the National Rural Crime Prevention Center\*

by

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To understand the programs of the National Rural Crime Prevention Center, perhaps a few observations concerning rural America would be appropriate. Rural is not a synonymous term with agriculture or farming. We generally define rural as places with a population of 2500 or less-- that is, small towns and open country. Most often when we tell people we are concerned with rural crime prevention, they immediately conjure up mental images of cows, chickens, combines, and other farm related objects. We are very much concerned with farm crime and its prevention. But we are equally concerned with crimes occurring to rural nonfarm residents. Rural nonfarm people outnumber farmers about 6 to 1. A second observation I would like to make concerns the number of rural residents in the United States. More people live in rural America today than at any previous time in recorded history. It is now in excess of 56 million persons. Interestingly, a population of 56 million exceeds, or nearly equals the population of such well known western nations as Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy. Actually, only <sup>14</sup>~~12~~ nations of the world numerically exceed the rural U.S. population. In addition, rural America is experiencing a population growth unprecedented in its history. More people are moving into rural areas than are moving out. Projections indicate this trend will continue through the 1980's.

A third observation I wish to make has to do with the current status of crime in rural America. In the past, I have often heard rural people say--"I have never locked my door",--"I wouldn't know where the key was if I decided to lock the door." What better social indicator, of the

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safety and security of rural people could you ask for than an unlocked door? An unlocked door is in a sense the hallmark of rurality! However, those days are rapidly disappearing, if they are not already gone. Let me briefly tell you what has and is now happening: data from the Uniform Crime Reports show a sharp upturn in rural crime beginning about 1960. On the average since 1960, crime has increased 21 percent per year for the rural U.S. Overall, rural crime has increased 446 percent from 1959 to 1979 according to these Uniform Crime Reports data. Let me characterize the problem this way--rural crime now equals what the urban crime problem was in the late 1960's. That is, a time period of little more than a decade. If you recall, during this period, the problem was viewed to be so great that a societal attack was launched. The Safe Street Act, LEAA, and many other such activities came into being. Finally, our own research suggests only 45 percent of crimes occurring to rural Americans are known to rural law enforcement agencies. Thus the rural crime problem is at least twice that of official data.

These observations are made to set the stage for a brief discussion of the National Rural Crime Prevention Center's program (brochure handed out).

#### Purpose of the Center

The philosophy of the Center is "action" oriented. Our major purpose is to aid rural people and law enforcement personnel in gaining a better understanding of the nature of their crime situation. A second purpose is to assist them in developing and identifying crime prevention skills necessary for solving their local problems. In our view, understanding the problem is an essential first step, lending direction and rationale to the building of sound strategies. In the application of strategies lies the fruits of prevention.

Let me share with you a few program highlights.

Research

*Research provides the underpinning*  
For building the rationale and explanations essential to developing sound programs for the understanding and potential control of problem behavior. The Center's research program is organized (A) to expand, generate, and test theoretical hypotheses aimed at building a knowledge base, (B) to initiate, cooperate, and assist in research programs with other institutions across the country, and (C) to design program responses based on research findings in order that maximum societal benefits be derived from such activities.

Let's briefly examine each of these points. The paper being distributed provides a listing of publications emanating from our research (see attachment).

We currently have 3 projects in process. First, we have collected information from 900 rural Ohio families this past summer. This is a victimization restudy of a similar victim survey completed in 1974 among the same population. In this restudy, we are compiling a large amount of information on crime prevention behavior of rural people which we do not believe exists in other studies. We think this will be extremely helpful to our understanding of what precautions rural people are taking to prevent crime and how effective these precautions have been in the past.

Second, we recently completed a study of the cost of vandalism and theft to road signs with 50 County Engineering Departments in Ohio. We found it cost \$31.00 per mile annually to replace road signs damaged by vandalism or removed in thefts. The third study involved crimes occurring to farm retail market outlets. Approximately 2/3 of these operators have some type of a crime problem. Hopefully, in the future, we will find support to conduct a national rural crime study.

In addition to our current research effort, we have aided many other states in initiating research projects. For example two researchers from Florida and two from Missouri each spent a day with us discussing sampling, methodologies and questionnaire preparation. Several other states have been in touch concerning rural crime research--5 states immediately come to mind--Indiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Washington, and Nebraska.

We have initiated with the North Central States Agricultural Research Directors a proposal to establish a research committee to address rural crime and its prevention. We anticipate it will be established later this Spring. If we are successful in this venture, we will expand it to other regions. The University of Nebraska is contemplating the establishment of a rural crime institute. We have tried to be helpful in providing ideas and information to this new effort.

Our third research objective actually leads us to our instructional programs.

#### Instructional Programs

Educational programs are being designed to serve the public's diverse interests and needs. The Center's prospective instructional audience includes crime prevention officers, Cooperative Extension Agents, teachers, community and youth leaders, students, and other concerned persons.

Instructional programs are being initiated through (A) classroom teaching at The Ohio State University (undergraduate and graduate levels), (B) Continuing Education on and off the University's main and regional campuses (credit and non-credit basis), and (C) Cooperative Extension workshops and meetings (at local, state, and national levels).

We are offering our first course on rural crime prevention this quarter at Ohio State University. We hope to make available other courses to a cross-section of students pursuing Degrees in Law Enforcement Education.

Perhaps the remainder of my limited time would be best spent talking about our Cooperative Extension workshops and meetings (brochure distributed).

One of the positive attributes of the Center is our in-place delivery system. As the Crime Prevention Designee of Science and Education-Extension, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, we have access to personnel in every state and county in the U.S., numbering over 16,000 professional educators. We are planning a newsletter designed to keep them informed on new research and aids to crime prevention. We co-sponsored with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency a national workshop for state extension personnel in rural crime prevention. Representatives from 17 states plus several farm related groups were in attendance. We have conducted in-state workshops for Extension staffs in Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Iowa and Pennsylvania. We have appeared on statewide crime prevention programs in Florida, Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Mississippi, Kansas, Indiana, Virginia, Missouri and Minnesota. Time will not permit my articulation of the many programs we have been involved with. We are now scheduled to assist programs in Iowa and Maryland. The final area is information dissemination.

#### Information Dissemination

The Center is working to gather and assimilate information to provide in one place up-to-date information on rural crime prevention. Multiple mediums (e.g., publications, reports, displays, and mass media programs) will be used to contact and inform rural people. I shall mention only a few things we are doing.

-- A Book on rural crime prevention (outline distributed).

-- Home and Farm Security Series

Five pieces are published, 2 others ready for publication, and at least 2 more are being written--a dozen more are planned.

The one's completed are:

- Machinery and Equipment
- Fuel Tank Security
- Livestock
- Timbertheft
- Being A Good Witness

-- Our guideline for these publications is that a person will have sufficient information on a specific aspect of prevention to make a decision and to take appropriate action.

-- Teacher's Guide (shown).

-- Video-tape Series--"Developing Capable People"

6 tapes produced:

- "Common Ground"
- "Developing Capable People"
- "Taking Positive Action in the Family"
- "Taking Positive Action in Working With Youth"
- "Taking Positive Action - The Role of Crime Prevention Professionals"
- "Taking Positive Action in the Schools."

We have been discussing with Mr. George Sunderland of NRTA/AARP the possibility of a program for the rural elderly. We think this has real possibility.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our programs with you. Further, we appreciate the opportunity to be associated with the National Crime Prevention Coalition. We hope McGruff will get himself some bib-overalls, a straw hat, some gum boots, and take a bit out of country crime.