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## Irish Farm Crime Survey

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# Irish Farm Crime Survey

June 2023

*Nicola Hughes & Matt Bowden*

TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

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UNIVERSITY DUBLIN



# **Irish Farm Crime Survey**

**June 2023**

**Nicola Hughes & Matt Bowden**

**Technological University Dublin**

## Summary of Key Findings

### 1. Prevalence of Crime Victimization

#### *General Victimization*

- 55% of participants reported that they or someone on their farm had been previous victims of crime.
- More than half of participants (55%) said they had been a victim of theft from their farm.
- In the 12 months prior to the survey, 18% of participants reported that they had been a victim of theft from their farm and 46% reported that they had been a victim of theft in the last five years.
- Most stolen items are, equipment and tools (21%), machinery (18%), fuel (12%) and money and personal items (6%).

#### *Burglary to home or farm buildings*

- 17% reported that their home had been burgled but that most burglaries were experienced (69%) more than five years ago.
- The rate of burglary reported to sheds and farm buildings (28%) was higher than for houses, with 59% of these occurring in the last three years and 13% in the last year.

### 2. Reporting and Non-Reporting

#### *Theft*

- 71% of participants reported their experience of theft to An Garda Síochána compared with 81% in national surveys.
- The primary reasons given for not reporting were based on a belief that (i) the incident was not serious enough; (ii) that the police would do nothing about it; and (iii) that there was insufficient evidence to warrant police action.
- When asked about why they might be reluctant to report any theft, 18% said this was because they believed there was not enough evidence; 13% that they did not regard it as serious; and 6% that it may be difficult to tell if an actual crime occurred.

## *Burglary*

- Burglary to houses is reported to An Garda Síochána at higher rates than that for farm buildings: 94% of participants reported burglaries of their houses compared with 72% for farm outbuildings or sheds.
- Reasons for non-reporting for sheds and outbuildings were similar to that for theft in general: a belief that An Garda Síochána would not act; a belief the incident was not serious enough; and a belief there was not enough evidence for An Garda Síochána to act.

### **3. Perceptions of Crime and Criminal Justice**

#### *Level of worry about household and personal crime*

- 64% of participants reported that they were worried about their homes being broken into.
- A higher proportion of farmers (75%) responded that they were more worried about having items stolen from around the farm, other than their residence.
- Smaller numbers of participants said they were worried about personal crime in comparison to household or crimes on the farm – 38% were worried about being ‘mugged or robbed’ while 35% were not worried.

#### *Crimes and problematic behaviours in the local area*

- Fly-tipping / illegal dumping appears to be a major concern among farmers – 76% reported this as a problem in their areas.
- Speeding and reckless driving is cited as the next major problem (66%).
- Approximately half of participants said that illegal hunting, animal worrying and trespassing were problems in their local areas.

#### *Perceptions of the criminal justice system*

- 96% of participants suggested that tougher laws and penalties were required to deal with thefts from farms.
- Similarly, 94% were of the view that courts are too lenient on people who steal from farms, with similar levels of agreement that the conviction rates for farm theft offences were too low, and that the justice system in general is too soft.

#### *An Garda Síochána*

- 51% of participants believed that An Garda Síochána ‘deal with the things that matter’.
- 45% agreed that An Garda Síochána can be relied upon.

- Farmers who were victims of theft (55%) were more likely to be dissatisfied with what An Garda Síochána were doing to prevent crime in their local area.
- 44% of the participants expressed a high level of trust in An Garda Síochána compared with 78% in the An Garda Síochána Public Attitudes Survey in 2021.
- Participants who believed crime to be serious in their local areas expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction with An Garda Síochána.
- To tackle farm crime participants agreed that more random patrols or greater police presence was required (61%), along with 53% who believed that An Garda Síochána should take stronger action on property theft.
- 45% of participants wanted An Garda Síochána to engage more often with farmers in person and 42% agreed that there should be a dedicated unit to deal with farm and rural crime.
- Of the participants who had an encounter with An Garda Síochána in the last six months (36%), 73% were satisfied with the encounter.
- 46% of participants were aware of An Garda Síochána Crime Prevention Officers and of those who had had an encounter with a Crime Prevention Officer, most (84%) were satisfied with the encounter.

#### 4. Farmers' Crime Prevention Practices and Awareness

- While 65% of participants agreed that crime prevention is the job of An Garda Síochána, 82% of participants believed that farmers themselves need to take responsibility for crime prevention.
- Participants are involved in a number of routine crime prevention practices such as taking precautions to lock the farmhouse (66%) and storing items out of sight (57%).
- While there is a high level of awareness of property marking as a crime prevention measure, only 18% of participants reported that they did this in practice.
- Similarly, only one third of farmers reported having an alarm system on their house and 5% on outbuildings, and 22% had CCTV on their outbuildings.

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## ***Introduction***

Crime and anti-social behavior within the farming community is an ongoing concern, not just within Ireland. The extent of victimisation against farms is not easy to establish. This is because not all victimisation against farms is reported and because not all victimisation is recorded in official crime statistics. Farm crimes are not counted as distinct categories in the official recorded crime statistics released by the Central Statistics Office (2021A), though farmers are included in the Central Statistics Office's Crime and Victimisation Survey (2020). This makes it difficult to obtain an accurate understanding of the true extent of rural offending rates and patterns, and the impact it has on individuals and the wider farming community. It also makes it difficult to determine where and how to direct crime prevention efforts and messaging.

In August 2017 to December 2018, a farm crime study was conducted among farmers in Victoria, Australia (Harkness, 2021; Harkness, 2017). The purpose of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of these farmers on issues around farm crime victimisation, policing and crime prevention. Since this initial study was conducted, a number of other countries around the world have conducted their own farm crime survey, with a view to comparing farm crime and victimisation internationally, to pilot scientific approaches and develop the capacity for comparative research.

Research conducted on farm crime is limited in Ireland (Bowden & Pytlarz, 2020; O'Brien & Windle, 2022; Walsh & Walsh, 2017). This is surprising given the extent of media coverage of farm crime and perceptions about the extent and seriousness of such crime (Bowden & Pytlarz, 2020; Windle, 2022). An understanding of the extent and impact of farm crime is important, not just from an economic perspective, but also from the perspective of fear of crime and the potential impact on quality of life (Smith, 2020; Windle, 2022). O'Brien and Windle (2022, p.287) highlight the need to "give a voice (to farmers) by reporting on the social reality of farming in Ireland." This current study attempts to give a voice to Irish farmers' experiences of farm crime and victimisation, and their perceptions of crime prevention, to better understand crimes committed against Irish farms and the measures Irish farmers take to prevent their victimisation. It is hoped that this research will add to the growing body of research on farm crime in Ireland, and will enhance our understanding of what we know about farm crime and its impact on individuals and the wider farming community. It is also hoped that this research will assist in the formation of crime prevention efforts and messaging to farmers and the wider farming community.

## ***Methodology***

The Irish farm Crime Survey replicated the farm crime survey that was conducted in Victoria, Australia, though it was modified and localised for Irish farmers. The survey was administered online with the collaboration and support of the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA). A quantitative methodology was employed, with a survey instrument consisting of 48 mostly closed questions. This survey sought responses on a number of different issues, including:

- Participant demographics
- Perceptions of crime and criminal justice
- Reporting of crime
- Attitudes to An Garda Síochána / rural policing
- Crime prevention and awareness
- Use of An Garda Síochána / other social media platforms

Responses were collected over a five-month period, from July 2022 to November 2022, as an online survey, through the SurveyMonkey platform. The IFA provided support to the researchers to advertise the study and encourage participation, and to distribute the questionnaire. This was done through a link to the survey on the IFA website, emails and WhatsApp messages to all IFA members about the study and with a link to the survey.

The survey sample is a non-probability sample and is comprised of responses from those wishing to take part. Convenience samples of this type can be subject to a number of biases, given the voluntary and non-random nature of responding (Ekitan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Hence the generalisability from this study to the entire population of farmers in Ireland is not possible. However, as the study is representative of the broad range of categories of farm types, locations and demographics, the survey gives a fair snapshot of the participants' experiences and attitudes.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and was based on three selection criteria - being over 18 years, living in the Republic of Ireland and either being a farmer or a member of a farm household. In total 1,449 individuals accessed the survey on SurveyMonkey. When anyone who was not eligible and incomplete questionnaires were removed, the final number of responses was 1,333. This response rate compares favourably with previous studies of members of the farming community in Ireland (Walsh & Walsh, 2017). The data was analysed using SPSS version 28.

## Research Findings

### 3.1 Participant demographics

Participants were asked a number of demographic questions, such as their age, gender and the size of their farm. This was done to establish if there was any difference in the experiences and perceptions of participants based on their demographic attributes. The majority of participants were male (79%), and almost two thirds (63%) were aged 55 years or older, and 37 percent were aged between 18 and 54 years. Most participants were full time farmers (60%) (Table 1). Our study broadly reflects the age and gender profile of Irish farmers when compared with official data. Farm holders in Ireland in 2020 were 86 percent male and 13 percent female. Our study also reflects the age profile of farmers in Ireland, with Cenus data showing that farmers tend to be clustered in older cohorts (Central Statistics Office, 2021 B), with an estimated 41,200 farmers aged over 65 years.

(Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, 2021).

**Table 1 Participant information**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number (n=1,322)</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	1,045	79
Female	267	20
Non-binary	2	0.2
Prefer not to say	8	0.6

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number (n=1,332)</i>	<i>%</i>
18-24 years	15	1
25-34 years	49	4
35-44 years	114	9
45-54 years	303	23
55-64 years	470	35
65-74 years	311	23
75 years or older	70	5

<i>Property type</i>	<i>Number (n=1,302)</i>	<i>%</i>
Full time	782	60
Part time	409	31
Hobby farm	51	4
Retired	60	5

Participants came from all counties, with more coming from Cork (13%) and Tipperary (9%), with the smallest number of participants coming from Longford (1%). In terms of region this breaks down into 20 percent from the South-West, 19 percent from the Mid-West and three percent from Dublin (Table 2).

**Table 2 Regional Breakdown**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number (n=1,299)</i>	<i>%</i>
South-West	253	20
Mid-West	249	19
West	183	14
South-East	174	13
Border	141	11
Mid-East	136	10
Midlands	124	10
Dublin	39	3

As can be seen from Table 3 the main type of farming was mixed grazing and livestock (32%), followed by specialist dairy (26%), accounting for over half (58%) of the farming undertaken by participants.

**Table 3 Type of farming**

<i>Type of farming</i>	<i>Number (n=1,324).</i>	<i>%</i>
Specialist tillage	57	4
Specialist sheep	87	7
Mixed crops & livestock	113	9
Specialist dairy	345	26
Mixed grazing & livestock	417	32
Mixed field crops	12	1
Specialist beef production	157	11
Other	136	10

Just over half (54%) of the farms were between 30 and 100 hectares in size, with five percent less than ten hectares and 12 percent more than 100 hectares (Table 4). The number residing on the property ranged from one to 15, with 73 percent having between one and four residing on the property, and the average number residing on the property being four. The time when someone was less likely to be physically present on the property was between 12pm and 3pm, 60

percent (Table 5).

**Table 4 Farm size**

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number (n=1,329)</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than 10 hectares	62	5
10-<20 hectares	165	12
20-<30 hectares	193	15
30-<50 hectares	349	26
50-<100 hectares	371	28
More than 100 hectares	162	12
Prefer not to say	27	2

**Table 5 Times when someone physically present on the property**

<i>Time</i>	<i>Number (n=1,333)</i>	<i>%</i>
6am to 9am	1,073	80
9am to 12pm	893	67
12pm to 3pm	806	60
3pm to 6pm	896	67
6pm to 10pm	1,023	77
10pm to 6am	1,011	76

Participants were also asked about their formal or informal involvement with local community organisations. Almost all participants (91%) were involved in at least one community organisation. From Table 6 it is clear that most participants were involved with the IFA (80%), followed by sporting organisations (31%) and community groups (24%). Though ten percent of participants stated that they were not involved in any formal or informal community organisations, the data reveal a high level of community and civic engagement amongst the participants.

**Table 6 Formal or informal involvement with community organisations**

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Number (n=1,333)</i>	<i>%</i>
Irish Famer's Association (IFA)	1,061	80
A local sporting club	414	31
A local community group	321	24
Neighbourhood Watch	244	18
Muintir na Tíre	159	12
Not involved with any community Organization	134	10
Involvement with another organisation	119	9
A school committee/ council	102	8
Senior Citizen group	43	3
Service organisations e.g. Rotary, Lions etc.	26	2
National Rural Safety Forum	19	1

### **3.2 Experiences of Crime and Victimisation**

Participants were asked if they or someone on their farm had been a victim of crime in the past. Just over half (55%) stated that they or someone on their farm had been a victim of crime in the past. The same number (55%) stated that they had been a victim of theft from their farm. For 18 percent of participants this theft had occurred within the past year, and for 46 percent of participants it had occurred between one and five years ago. The most common items that were taken were, machinery (18%), farm supplies (11%), fuel (12%) and farm equipment or tools (21%) (Table 7). Eleven participants stated that a firearm had been taken from their farm, most of which were taken three years or more ago. Most of the thefts took place either on the farm, within sight of roads, or around the farm residence and sheds (71%).

**Table 7 Items taken from their farm at the time of the most recent theft**

Items stolen from farm	Number (n=1,333)	%
Equipment and tools (non-mechanical)	280	21
Machinery (not a registered vehicle, eg. wheat header etc)	233	18
Fuel	154	12
Farm supplies and inputs (e.g. fuel, chemicals, fencing supplies, livestock feed, vet supplies, seeds etc.)	144	11
Other	106	8
Theft of money or personal items	76	6
Metal	74	6
Registered vehicle (such as car, SUV, truck, tractor etc.)	51	4
Livestock	55	4
Firearms	11	1
Water (from a tank, dam etc.)	7	0.5
Crops	6	0.5
GPS tracking system	1	0.1

The majority of participants who experienced a theft from their farm did report the theft to An Garda Síochána (71%): this compares to a reporting rate of 81 percent among the general population (Copeland & Walker, 2021). The main reasons for not reporting the theft to An Garda Síochána was a belief that the theft was not serious enough to report, a belief that An Garda Síochána would do nothing about it and a belief that there was not enough evidence for An Garda Síochána to proceed. In only 11 percent of thefts were the items recovered.

Participants were asked two further questions in relation to their experience of crime, had their home ever been burgled and had their sheds or outbuildings ever been burgled (Table 8). Seventeen percent of participants said that their home had been broken into, with most burglaries occurring five or more years ago (69%). Most participants whose house was burgled, reported the incident to An Garda Síochána (94%). A greater number of participants had experienced a burglary of a shed or outbuilding, 28 percent. For over half (59%) this burglary had occurred three or more years ago, though for 13 percent of participants this burglary had occurred within the last year. The rate of reporting to An Garda Síochána for a burglary of a shed or outbuilding was lower than for a burglary of a house, 72 percent. The main reasons for not reporting this incident to An

Garda Síochána was a belief that An Garda Síochána would do nothing about it (29%), a belief that the incident was not serious enough to report (27%) and a belief that there was not evidence for An Síochána to proceed (21%).

**Table 8 Burglary of house or shed/ outbuilding**

House burgled	Number (n=1,279)	%
Yes	213	17
No	1,044	82
Don't know	22	2

Shed or outbuildings burgled	Number (n=1,280)	%
Yes	361	28
No	823	64
Don't know	96	8

### 3.3 *Perceptions of Crime and Criminal Justice*

Participants were asked a series of questions to try to establish their perceptions of crime and criminal justice, including how serious they thought crime was in their local area, what crime they were worried about in their local area, what they perceived to be problematic in their local area, and about their attitudes towards the criminal justice system.

Crime in their local area was perceived to be either a very serious or serious problem by half of the participants (50%), while one third (33%) perceived crime in their local area to be either not very serious or not serious at all. Participants aged between 45 and 64 years were more likely to view crime as a serious problem in their local area. When asked what type of crime they were worried about (Table 9), 64 percent stated that they were very or fairly worried about their home being burgled, 75 percent were very or fairly worried about having items stolen from outside the farmhouse, 49 percent were very or fairly worried about having items stolen from their car, and 46 percent were very or fairly worried about having personal items stolen. The proportion who were worried about being mugged or robbed was similar to the proportion who were not worried about this, 38 percent and 35 percent respectively. Thirty nine percent were worried about being physically attacked by strangers, and a similar proportion (34%) not worried about this. Participants aged 45 to 64 years were more worried about being physically attacked by a stranger than younger participants aged 18 to 34 years, 21 percent compared to two percent respectively.



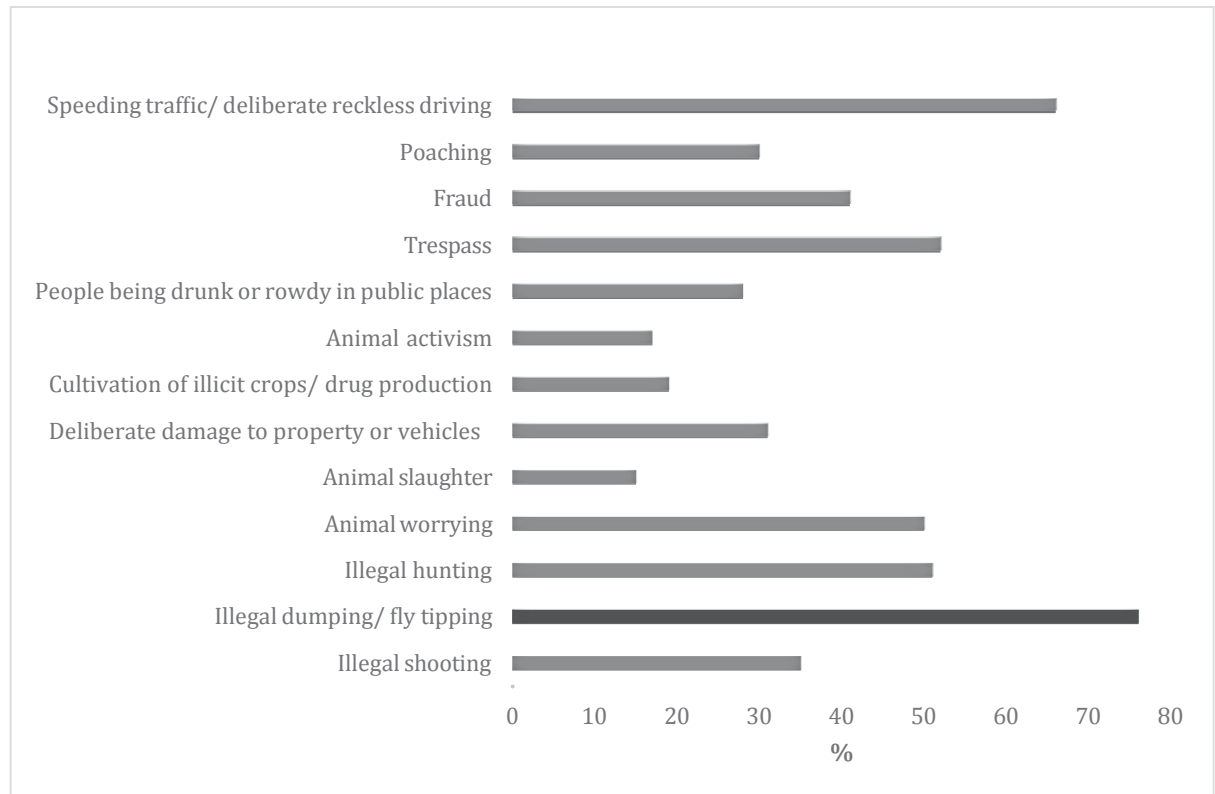
**Table 9 Worried about crime occurring in their local area**

Worried about	Very worried	Fairly worried	Neutral	Not very worried	Not at all worried
	%	%	%	%	%
Home broken into <sup>1</sup>	18	46	19	15	2
Items stolen outside farmhouse <sup>2</sup>	24	51	14	10	1
Being mugged or robbed <sup>3</sup>	12	25	28	28	7
Items stolen from car <sup>4</sup>	14	35	27	21	3
Being physically attacked <sup>5</sup>	14	25	28	27	7
Having personal items stolen <sup>6</sup>	14	32	25	25	4

<sup>1</sup>n=1,234, <sup>2</sup>n=1,230, <sup>3</sup>n=1,232, <sup>4</sup>n=1,232, <sup>5</sup>n=1,236, <sup>6</sup>n=1,232

There were a number of activities which participants viewed as more problematic in their local area than others (Figure 1); illegal dumping / fly tipping was viewed as very serious or serious by 76 percent of participants, followed by speeding or deliberate reckless driving (66%), illegal hunting (51%), animal worrying (50%) and trespassing (52%).

**Figure 1 Problems regarded as serious in the local area**



Participants were also asked about their perceptions of the criminal justice system and its treatment of farm crime specifically (Table 10). In all cases participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the criminal justice system was not tough enough on farm crime; that there should be tougher laws and penalties for thefts from farms (95%), the courts are too lenient on people who steal from farms (94%), the conviction rate for farm theft offences is too lenient (94%) and the criminal justice system is too soft (92%).

**Table 10 Perceptions of the criminal justice system**

Perceptions of the criminal justice system	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Tougher laws and penalties for farm theft <sup>1</sup>	69	26	4	0.1	0.2
Courts are too lenient on people who steal from farms <sup>2</sup>	67	27	5	0.3	0.2
Conviction rate for farm theft is too low <sup>3</sup>	65	29	6	0.2	0.1
The criminal justice system is too soft <sup>4</sup>	64	28	7	1	0.2

<sup>1</sup>n=1,236, <sup>2</sup>n=1,234, <sup>3</sup>n=1,235, <sup>4</sup>n=1,235

### 3.4 Reporting Crime

In order to establish general attitudes towards reporting crime, participants were asked if they would report any theft from their farm to An Garda Síochána. Almost two thirds (63%) reported that they would report any theft from their farm all of the time, 12 percent would report it quite often, 16 percent would report it occasionally and ten percent would never report any theft to An Garda Síochána. The main reasons for not reporting any theft from their farm to An Garda Síochána (Table 11) was if there was a belief that there was not enough evidence for An Garda Síochána to proceed (18%) and a belief that it was not serious enough to report (13%). Of those participants who gave another reason for not reporting any theft from their farm to An Garda Síochána, the main reason was a belief that An Garda Síochána would do nothing about it (64 participants).

**Table 11 Why reluctant to report any theft from their farm to An Garda Síochána**

	Number (n=1,333)	%
Belief there is not enough evidence for An Garda Síochána to proceed	244	18
Belief that it is not serious enough to report	176	13
May be difficult to tell if a crime has occurred	84	6
Other (Belief An Garda Síochána would do nothing)	84 (64)	6 (5)
Cost of loss is less than the insurance excess	57	4
If I do not hold insurance	17	1

### 3.5 *An Garda Síochána*

Participants were asked a series of questions on their thoughts about An Garda Síochána. It was not necessary for a participant to have had contact with a member of An Garda Síochána, as the questions sought to better understand the general opinion of members of the farming community of An Garda Síochána in their local area.

In general, participants expressed favourable attitudes towards An Garda Síochána (Table 12): 51 percent of participants believe they deal with the things that matter, 46 percent believe they can be relied upon and 61 percent believe they treat everyone fairly. However, while 39 percent believe An Garda Síochána to be accessible when needed, 37 percent disagreed, and 39 percent did not believe enough was being done by An Garda Síochána to prevent crime in their local area.

**Table 12 Satisfaction with An Garda Síochána (AGS)**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	%	%	%	%	%
AGS dealing with things that matter <sup>1</sup>	12	39	30	14	6
AGS can be relied on <sup>2</sup>	10	36	28	19	8
AGS treat everyone fairly <sup>3</sup>	13	48	27	7	5
AGS is well resourced <sup>4</sup>	3	14	31	36	16
AGS is accessible when needed <sup>5</sup>	6	33	25	25	12
I have a high level of trust in AGS <sup>6</sup>	10	34	29	17	10
Enough is being done by AGS <sup>7</sup>	6	23	33	27	12

<sup>1</sup>n=1,186, <sup>2</sup>n=1,185, <sup>3</sup>n=1,187, <sup>4</sup>n=1,186, <sup>5</sup>n=1,186, <sup>6</sup>n=1,186, <sup>7</sup>n=1,188

Participants who had been a victim of theft from their farm (55%) were more likely to be dissatisfied with what An Garda Síochána were doing in their local area to prevent crime, 24 percent compared to 14 percent who were satisfied that enough was being done (Table 13).

**Table 13 Satisfied that An Garda Síochána are doing enough to prevent crime in their local area by whether or not participants were a victim of theft on their farm**

Level of satisfaction	Victim of Theft		Total
	Yes %	No %	
Strongly Agree	3	4	6
Agree	11	12	23
Neither	18	14	33
Disagree	16	11	27
Strongly disagree	8	4	12

Forty-four percent of participants had a high level of trust in An Garda Síochána, and 27 percent did not have a high level of trust in An Garda Síochána. This is in comparison to 78 percent who found An Garda Síochána trustworthy in the Garda Annual Public Attitudes Survey in 2021 (Copeland et al, 2022). When asked if they were satisfied with the level of policing in their local area, 36

percent were very satisfied or satisfied, while 31 percent were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied. Table 14 shows satisfaction levels with the standard of policing in their local area, by how participants classified crime in their local area. This shows that of those who classified crime to be either very serious or serious in their local area (20%) are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the standard of policing in their local area, this compares to seven percent of those who classify crime as either not serious or not at all serious in their local area. In terms of resources, 52 percent of participants did not believe that the local An Garda Síochána were well resourced. More older participants, those aged 55 to 74, believed An Garda Síochána dealt with the things that matter, can be relied upon, treated everyone fairly, and had a high level of trust in An Garda Síochána, compared to participants aged 18 to 34 years.

**Table 14 Satisfaction with the standard of policing in their local area by classification of crime in their local area**

Level of satisfaction	Classify crime in their local area			
	Very serious or serious	Neutral	Not serious or not at all serious	Total
	%	%	%	%
Highly satisfied or satisfied	14	6	16	36
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	17	7	10	34
Very dissatisfied or dissatisfied	20	4	7	31

In terms of the role of An Garda Síochána in crime prevention, participants were asked what should An Garda Síochána do differently to tackle farm crime (Table 15). Almost two thirds (61%) believed there should be more random patrols, 53 percent believed An Garda Síochána should take more action on property theft and 45 percent believed they should engage more with farmers in person. Forty two percent were in favour of establishing a dedicated farm crime unit and just 23 percent were in favour of the development of state-wide strategies.

**Table 15 What should An Garda Síochána do differently to tackle farm crime**

	Number (n=1,333)	%
More random patrols/ physical presence	815	61
Take stronger action on property theft	707	53
Engage with farmers in person more often	605	45
Establish a dedicated unit to deal with rural/ farm crime	562	42
Work harder on bringing perpetrators to court	521	39
Better education to rural communities about crime prevention	329	25
Develop state-wide strategies	300	23
Engage with farmers by social media	268	20
Other methods	118	9

Participants were asked about their contact with An Garda Síochána within the last six months, with 36 percent stating that they had had an encounter with An Garda Síochána within the last six months. This encounter was viewed favourably, with 73 percent stating that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the encounter.

The role of a Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) within An Garda Síochána is to encourage, promote and advise on crime prevention to both the local community and the business community ([www.Garda.ie](http://www.Garda.ie)). Participants were asked if they aware of CPOs: 46 percent were aware and, of those, 33 percent had had an encounter with a CPO. Most encounters took place at organised events within the community or events organised by farming organisations, such as the IFA, and 84 percent of participants were either very satisfied or satisfied with their encounter with a CPO.

### 3.6

#### ***Crime Prevention and Awareness***

Participants were asked about the different crime prevention measures they have implemented on their farms and about crime prevention more generally. Almost two thirds (65%) believe crime prevention to be the job of An Garda Síochána, and 82 percent believe that farmers need to take responsibility themselves for crime prevention. When asked about what crime prevention practices they believed were important, 87 percent of participants believed that it is important to mark property and 86 percent stated that they would use new

property marking techniques. Only 22 percent of participants were familiar with DNA property marking.

In terms of what crime prevention practices participants actually used (Table 16), the main practices used were to store everything out of sight (57%) to lock the farmhouse (66%) to count livestock regularly (54%), to lock vehicles (54%) and to lock sheds and outbuildings (42%). Interestingly, though most believe it is important to mark their property, only 18 percent did mark their property, and just 16 percent kept a record of serial numbers.

**Table 16 Crime prevention practices**

<i>Crime prevention practice (n=1,333)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Locking farmhouse	882	66
Storing everything out of sight of the main road	755	57
Locking vehicles	725	54
Counting livestock regularly	721	54
Locking sheds and outbuildings	560	42
Alarm system -house	448	34
Installation of security lights/ alarms	437	33
Presence of a watch dog	421	32
Video surveillance/ CCTV – house	367	28
Perimeter fencing	354	27
Warning signage	323	24
Video surveillance/ CCTV – outbuildings	298	22
Mark property	246	18
Keeping records of serial numbers	212	16
Locks on machinery	195	15
Alarm system – outbuildings	68	5
Other	59	4
None of these practices	22	2

Engagement with police information sources was limited: Facebook (8%), Twitter (6%), Instagram (2%), An Garda Síochána website (5%) and Crimestoppers (1%). Related to this is that most participants consulted the newspaper for information on crime (47%), followed by community WhatsApp groups (19%).



## 4

## Discussion

### 4.1

### Victimisation and crime prevention

The findings from the research show that the rate of lifetime victimisation among participants was relatively high. Just over half of participants reported that they or someone on their farm had been a victim of crime and a similar number had been a victim of theft from their farm, with almost one fifth stating that they had been a victim of theft within the last 12 months. This is lower than the rate reported by Walsh and Walsh (2017), though is still high by national comparisons (Central Statistics Office, 2020). The main items stolen were equipment and tools, machinery, fuel, money and personal items. This is similar to the experiences of farmers in the studies by Walsh and Walsh (2017) and O'Brien and Windle (2022) and in other international studies (Barclay & Donnermeyer, 2011; Ceccato, 2016). The rate of burglary reported to sheds and farm buildings was higher than for houses with over half of these occurring in the last three years and over ten percent within the last year. Again, this is higher than among the general population (Central Statistics Office, 2020). It has been suggested that farms are attractive targets for those seeking to engage in crime, due to the location of large areas of land in remote areas, lack of visibility and the availability of attractive items, such as tools and machinery, which can be easily transported and can be sold on (Donnermeyer & Barclay, 2005).

Given the level of victimisation among participants, it is important to understand their attitudes towards crime prevention measures and what crime prevention measures and techniques they utilise. While almost two thirds of participants agreed that crime prevention was the job of An Garda Síochána, most believed that farmers themselves need to take responsibility for crime prevention. Participants in the survey are involved in a number of routine crime prevention practices such as taking precautions to lock the farmhouse and storing items out of sight. While there is a high level of awareness of property marking as a crime prevention measure, less than one fifth of participants reported that they did this in practice. Similarly, only one third of farmers reported having an alarm system on their house and even less had an alarm on outbuildings, and just over one fifth had CCTV on their outbuildings.

This suggests a level of complacency among participants about security and that crime prevention is not a main focus for them. A similar level of complacency has been found in other studies (Harkness, 2017) and Windle (2022) has suggested this is often because farmers lack the time and the resources to devote to crime prevention. It is also possibly related to the fact

that one third of participants were part-time farmers and as such had other commitments on their time. There is a need, therefore, to provide farmers with information and assistance on what crime prevention measures are available and what measures are most appropriate for their specific needs and circumstances. Consideration should also be given as to how to provide assistance with the cost of crime prevention measures for members of the farming community. Having such measures in place also has the potential to reduce fear of crime and enhance quality of life.

## **4.2 Reporting and Non-reporting of crime**

The rate of reporting of theft was lower among participants than nationally. Walsh and Walsh (2017) found a similarly low rate of reporting of incidents of theft. The primary reasons given for not reporting were based on a belief that the incident was not serious enough, that An Garda Síochána would do nothing about it, or there was insufficient evidence to warrant police action. That farmers are reluctant to report crime to the police has been found in other studies, with the rate of reporting differing for different types of offences (Donnermeyer & Barclay, 2005; Walsh & Walsh, 2017). Participants in the current study were more likely to report a burglary to a house to An Garda Síochána, than burglary for farm buildings. The reasons for non-reporting incidents of burglary for sheds and outbuildings were similar to that for theft in general: a belief that An Garda Síochána would not act; the incident was believed not to be serious enough; or a belief that there was not enough evidence for An Garda Síochána to act.

## **4.3 Perceptions of crime and criminal justice**

In order to better understand the experiences of farmers of crime and victimisation it is also important to understand their perceptions of crime, what they are fearful of and what they perceive as problematic within their local communities. It is these wider fears and perceptions, which may not be related to victimisation, but which can have an impact on the fear of crime and quality of life of members of the farming community and their families, and the wider rural community. Therefore, participants were asked a number of questions about what they were worried about and what they regarded as problematic within their local area.

Participants were asked about how serious they would classify crime in their local area. Half of the participants perceived crime in their local area to be either a very serious or serious problem, with one third perceiving crime in their local area to be either not very serious or not serious at all. Participants aged between 45 and 65 years were more likely to view crime as a serious problem

in their local area. National crime victimisation studies have shown that older age groups are more concerned about crime, while they were less likely to be victims of crime (Central Statistics Office, 2020 & various years).

Three quarters of participants reported that they were worried about having items stolen from around the farm, and almost two thirds were worried about their homes being broken into. This is interesting given the levels of engagement with crime prevention measures by participants. Smaller numbers of participants said they were worried about personal crime in comparison to household or crimes on the farm, and a similar number were worried about being 'mugged or robbed', to those who were not worried about being 'mugged or robbed'.

Fly-tipping / illegal dumping appeared to be a major concern among participants, with just over three quarters reporting it as a problem in their local areas. Speeding and reckless driving were also cited as major problems in the local community. While approximately half of participants said that illegal hunting, animal worrying and trespassing were problems in their local areas. This is similar to the concerns of the participants in the research conducted by O'Brien and Windle (2022), who were more concerned with thefts of small machinery, fraud, illegal dumping and trespassing, than with theft of larger machinery, for example, which was believed to be rare. Thus, participants appear to be more concerned with what they can see and what is actually happening in their local communities, such as illegal dumping and reckless driving, than with what could happen.

Participants were asked about their perceptions of criminal justice, primarily as it relates to crime against the farming community. The justice system in general was perceived to be too soft by the majority of participants, with the majority also suggesting that tougher laws and penalties are required to deal with thefts from farms. Similarly, a majority of participants were of the view that the courts are too lenient on people who steal from farms and that conviction rates are too low for farm theft offences.

Research in the UK (Smith, 2022) has shown that while farmers are stressed about weather, finance, time pressures and other factors, it is critical to note the role that concern about crime and victimisation plays as a stressor for farmers. Equally, Smith (2020) has shown that stress and worry about crime has a negative impact on farmers' mental health.

#### 4.4 An Garda Síochána

The attitudes of participants towards An Garda Síochána were generally positive, most tended to express satisfaction, but between one quarter and one third were ambivalent towards An Garda Síochána, stating that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with An Garda Síochána. On the positive side, over half believed that An Garda Síochána deal with the things that matter, and almost two thirds believe they treat everyone fairly. Less than half believe An Garda Síochána can be relied on and again, less than half have trust in An Garda Síochána to deal with farm crime. However, just over half of participants do not believe An Garda Síochána to be well resourced and while one third believe An Garda Síochána to be accessible when needed, a similar number believe that An Garda Síochána is not accessible when needed. Participants also stated, as a reason for not reporting theft, a belief that An Garda Síochána would not do anything about it. The level of trust in An Garda Síochána expressed by participants stands in sharp contrast to the high levels of trust among the general population found in the An Garda Síochána Public Attitudes Survey in 2021, less than half compared to over three quarters (Copeland & Walker, 2021). Participants who believed crime to be a serious issue in their local areas expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction with An Garda Síochána. Thus, suggesting that there is a connection between perceptions of crime and satisfaction with An Garda Síochána.

Participants who had been a victim of theft from their farm were more dissatisfied with the standard of policing in their local area, than those who had not been a victim of theft from their farm, one fifth compared to one tenth respectively. This is in contrast to what was found by O'Brien and Windle (2022), whose participants who had reported a crime to An Garda Síochána were more satisfied with rural policing than those who had not. This again suggests the need for further research in this area.

Of the participants who had an encounter with a member of An Garda Síochána in the last six months, the majority were satisfied with the encounter. Less than half of all participants were aware of An Garda Síochána Crime Prevention Officers and those who had had an encounter were satisfied with it. This shows the importance of members of An Garda Síochána having a presence in local communities.

To tackle farm crime participants agreed that more random patrols by An Garda Síochána or a greater Garda presence was required, with over half of participants believing that An Garda Síochána should take stronger action on property theft. Less than half of participants wanted An Garda Síochána to engage more often with farmers in person and a similar number agreed that

there should be a dedicated unit to deal with farm and rural crime. Less than one quarter of participants were in favour of the development of state-wide strategies.

When given the option to give another answer to those listed, some participants used this option to express concern about the level of commitment of An Garda Síochána towards dealing with reported incidents of farm crime, particularly if they had a previous experience with An Garda Síochána. Given that this was not the focus of this study and that most participants did not use the other option to answer the questions, no conclusions can be drawn from these responses. It does, however, suggest the need to undertake more detailed and focused research in this area.

## **5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Just over half of all participants had been a victim of theft from their farm, with 71 percent stating that they had reported the incident to An Garda Síochána. Farmers are more concerned about acquisitive crime, such as burglary from their homes or around their farms than they are of becoming a victim of a physical crime, such as being physically assaulted by a stranger. They are most concerned with antisocial crimes within their communities, such as trespassing, illegal dumping, animal worrying, and speeding and reckless driving.

While farmers are in support of crime prevention practices, such as marking their property, the actual proportion who mark their property is substantially lower. This suggests that awareness of the existence of a security response does not translate into practice: for example, less than one third of participants have an alarm on their dwelling, and just one-twentieth have an alarm installed on outbuildings. While most participants did report an incident of theft to An Garda Síochána, there was still a number who would not report such incidents. This is important from the perspective of establishing the true extent of rural offending, rates and patterns.

By encouraging the reporting of incidents of farm crime, regardless of how minor they may be perceived, more informed crime prevention decisions can be made by An Garda Síochána and by farmers themselves, and more robust information provided on crime prevention and safety. This will be of benefit not just to the individual farmer, but to the wider rural community, who are also affected by the problems in the local community identified by participants, such as dumping/illegal fly tipping, speeding traffic/ deliberate reckless driving and fraud. It is also clear from existing research that farmers would benefit from more information

and support on what crime prevention measures are available and what would be appropriate for their individual farm. This is particularly so given that O'Brien and Windle (2022) found that farmers may not have the time or the resources to implement crime prevention measures.

The current research is one of the first research studies on farm crime among Irish farmers (O'Brien & Windle, 2022; Walsh & Walsh, 2017). In order to fully understand rates and patterns of rural crime and the extent of victimisation of the farming community, it is important to collect data on an ongoing basis and to involve both members of the farming community and farming organisations, and to conduct more specific research with the farming community. This will enhance the understanding and awareness of this issue among the farming community, farming organisations, rural communities and An Garda Síochána.

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