

# Emerging issues in rural crime – ‘Crops and Robbers’

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# Overview

- The myths surrounding rural crime in the UK
- Contemporary reality:
  - Organised Crime Gangs (OCGs)
  - Emerging trends and hidden crimes
  - Internationalisation

# Rural Crime Myths

## Myth #1

- The UK countryside experiences low levels of crime
- Reality:
  - NFU Mutual Rural Crime Survey 2015 = estimated cost of rural crime in the UK of £37.8million
  - NRCN Rural Crime Survey = estimated cost of rural crime in the UK may well be in the region of £800million

# Rural Crime Myths

## Myth #2

- All rural crimes are the same
- Reality:
  - No two rural communities are the same, therefore different crimes proliferate in different areas
  - An increase in rural crime research in the UK would support this challenge to the myth

# Rural Crime Myths

## Myth #3

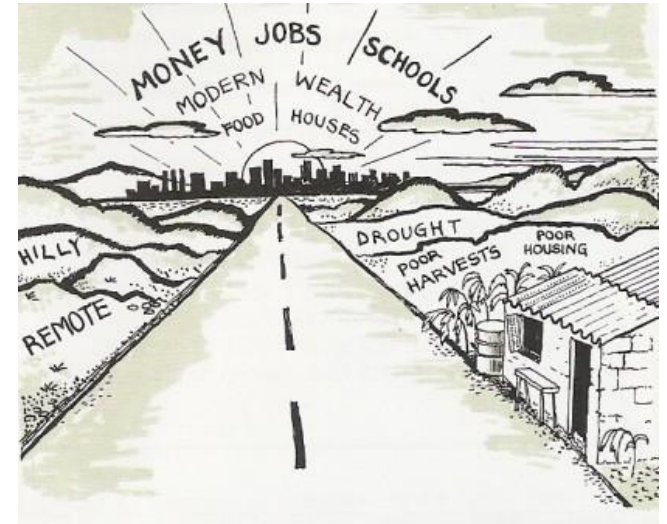
- Rural = Gemeinschaft
- Reality:
  - Rural communities in the UK are no longer “private” or “exclusive”
  - This myth allows the less visible/attractive aspects of rural life to remain hidden and possibly disregarded by researchers?



# Rural Crime Myths

## Myth #4

- Rural Britain is not affected by social disorganisation
- Reality:
  - Social disorganisation is becoming increasingly evident in British villages
  - Research indicates high out-migration, in-migration and counter-migration in rural Britain



# Rural Crime Myths

## Myth #5

- Crime rates are only now increasing
- Reality:
  - Historically dealt with locally
  - No police force until 1829
  - Ubiquitous nature of modern media = we hear more about rural crime

# Organised Crime Gangs

- British countryside no longer the domain of the 'gentleman poacher'
- Seen as a soft target for OCGs
- OCGs are travelling criminals working cross-borders e.g. county, police force, international
- Significant planning and surveillance is undertaken by the OCG once target identified





# Emerging Trends

- Market Forces
  - Supply and demand often dictates what is targeted
- Agro-chemical theft & counterfeiting
  - “Pesticides are among the most regulated products in the world...more counterfeit and illicit pesticides have been seized...they can ruin crops, affect food chains and ultimately threaten public health and safety” (Europol et al 2012)



# Emerging Trends



- Solar panels
  - Increasing reports this year of solar farms being targeted across rural areas
- Heritage crime
  - Theft from historic rural buildings, mostly churches. Traditionally metal, but increasingly flagstones and capstones
  - Illegal off-roading in SSSIs causes upheaval and surface erosion damaging delicate ecosystems and archaeology

# Hidden Crimes

- Modern slavery
  - Forced labour in agriculture; many are migrants from Eastern Europe
- Domestic Abuse
  - Social isolation created by DA compounded by geographic isolation
- Hate crime
  - Fear, mistrust and lack of understanding in traditional, homogenous, heterosexual, white communities

# Internationalisation

- Items stolen in UK often end up abroad as payment for people, drugs, arms
- Organised Crime Gangs have 'shopping lists' to send to Europe, Asia and Africa
- Criminals and also victims of crimes in the English countryside are often foreign nationals

# Internationalisation

- Rural crime is an international problem with other countries experiencing similar problems to the UK
- Africa
- USA
- Australia
- Republic of Ireland



# Conclusions

- There are many myths surrounding rural crime in the UK and beyond
- British countryside is no longer the domain of the 'gentleman poacher' but the target of OCGs
- Crime in rural Britain touches other countries
- Rural crime is an international problem
- Rural crime research in the UK needs developing as a distinct study area



# Thank you for your time

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