

# Working together to bring down rural crime

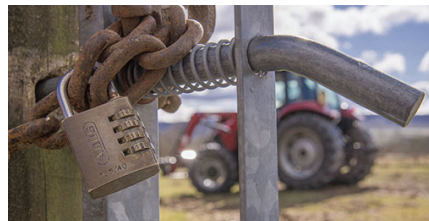
→ **CHIEF CONSTABLE SIMON PRINCE** of Dyfed-Powys police is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead on wildlife and rural crime. He writes exclusively for the Countryside Alliance about the task in hand.



**R**URAL CRIME; for some it conjures up images of a Greengrass-type character, trudging along a river bank, poaching the odd fish for his supper. In fact, the perpetrators are often organised individuals and groups, committing a wide range of offences from fuel and metal thefts to raptor poisoning, with the reality for many victims being significant financial loss and untold pain and suffering for the animals affected. When assessing the impact of crime on rural communities, we have to understand the limitations of crime statistics: a single crime can seriously harm a livelihood. We have to look beyond the numbers.

So how do we tackle rural crime? Investigators are often faced with vast open landscapes, limited security, skilled organised offenders and a lack of witnesses. From poaching to fuel thefts, the response to these types of offences can only be delivered effectively through an organised multi-agency approach, involving all partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors to deliver real results. We also need to invest in the long term in meaningful engagement with our rural communities; working with them to deliver on the important issues.

Farmwatch is one of our major partnerships and works in two ways; firstly, by providing information to landowners, farmers and people who live in rural communities about what they can do to protect their property and,



secondly, to provide a network for raising awareness of any incident or occurrences that are unusual for the area. Using the same principle, O.W.L. (The Online Watch Link) provides the police and other users with a mobile phone with a secure platform on which to share information about suspicious incidents in their area, in quick time, using the mobile phone network. These ideas bring good old fashioned benefits of looking out for your neighbour fully into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Continuing the theme of working together; the local Neighbourhood Policing team should be central in working with the various watch schemes, communities and other partner agencies. Police forces across the country are using their neighbourhood teams to create the conduit through which information can flow and knowledge can be gained and benefited from. This sounds simple, however with policing priorities traditionally focused on urban policing, officers often lack the specialist knowledge when dealing with crimes committed on farms, agricultural businesses and in the rural community. As the national police lead for rural crime I am working tirelessly with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys police to establish a centre of excellence for rural policing. We have been consulting with the public to find out what matters to them, the issues unique to living in a sparsely populated landscape and their needs for policing in the future. Our vision is to identify best practice for policing rural communities and enable this knowledge to be shared across the UK for the benefit of all. Broad based communities of interest,

such as the National Rural Crime Network (of which the Alliance is a part), are welcome initiatives and have the potential to form a powerful partnership.

A prominent aspect of all these solutions is prevention; preventing crime will inevitably be easier and more satisfying than solving it. Working together, improving education and knowledge not just for potential victims of crime but also for the investigators and partner agencies; we can confidently prevent the majority of these offences occurring. For those cases where we cannot, we are working collaboratively with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to improve our ability to identify and prosecute rural crime. Work is currently underway within the CPS to ensure prosecutors have earlier access to wildlife prosecution files, to allow the extra time required to deal with the complex legislation. They are also creating standardised procedures for dealing with such crimes in court, ensuring that specialist knowledge is available and applied consistently across the country by all prosecutors.

In summary, however you are affected by rural crime, it is no less significant than for someone living in the inner city. Recognising this, and working in partnership with others across all areas of prevention, investigation and prosecution, we can deliver a new style of enforcement for those intent on committing crime in our rural communities. I invite everyone living in a rural community to get connected, whether it be online, through any of the watch schemes, or a network approach. Let's get back in touch with our neighbours, and tackle rural crime. ●

**WE NEED TO INVEST IN THE LONG TERM IN MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES; WORKING WITH THEM TO DELIVER ON THE IMPORTANT ISSUES.**



**Chief Constable Simon Prince** of Dyfed-Powys police is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead on wildlife and rural crime. In March 2013, Simon was appointed as chief constable for Dyfed-Powys Police, becoming the first chief officer in Wales to be appointed by a Police and Crime Commissioner.