



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2014-03921

**Keyword:** Crime

**Subject:** Rural Crime In South Down

### Request and Answer:

#### Question

Due to the recent figures announcing that there has been a 5 per cent increase in rural crime in the last year, I am looking to do an article about the rural crime rate in the South Down area. Please see below a number of questions in relation to this issue, specific areas that I would be looking to cover with this issue in South Down include - Banbridge, Rathfriland, Hilltown, Kilkeel, Annalong, Newry, Castlewellan (and surrounding areas).

Clarification: That is fine that questions 5-8 and 10 are answered for agricultural crime. Further to our conversation, that is also fine that the PSNI can provide the average conviction rate for rural crime in response to question 9.

#### Question 1

Has there been an increase in rural crime in the South Down area in the last year?

#### Answer

This is to inform you that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information you requested. The decision has been taken to disclose the located information to you in full.

**N.B. Definition of Rural Crime** - Rural crime covers all burglary, robbery and theft offences, in a geographical area based on an aggregation of settlement bands. Crimes are allocated to this geography by using the available postcode information.

**N.B. Definition of Agricultural Crime** - Agricultural crime covers burglary, robbery and theft offences where the property or vehicles stolen have an agricultural link (e.g. farm equipment, agricultural vehicles, livestock) or where the location was agricultural (e.g. farm, farmhouse). **Not all agricultural crime will occur in a rural settlement.**

- Agricultural crime accounts for approximately 2.3% of the total burglary, robbery and theft crimes.

- The recent figures refer to a 5.2% increase in the **cost** of rural theft across the UK and a 15% rise in the **cost** in Northern Ireland.

In the South Down area there has been a decrease of 8% in Rural Crime from 2012 to 2013 and an

increase of 14% in Agricultural Crime from 2012 to 2013.

### Question 2

Do you have the figures available for this?

### Answer

Please see the table below.

	2012		2013	
	Rural Crime	Agricultural Crime	Rural Crime	Agricultural Crime
South Down	1,704	161	1,569	184
Northern Ireland	7,915	869	6,958	891

### Question 3

What would be a reason for the increase in rural crime?

### Answer

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 legislates for the rights of an individual to seek access to information held by a Public Authority. The Act only extends to requests for recorded information. It does not require public authorities to answer questions generally, only if they already hold the answers in recorded form. Requests which are not for recorded information, but instead ask questions, such as “why do you think this happens?” or “please explain why ‘b’ does this” are not requests for recorded information. The Act does not extend to such requests for information unless the answer to any such request is already held in recorded form. PSNI does not hold information in recorded form which would answer your question.

### Question 4

How many crimes have taken place in comparison to the previous year?

### Answer

Please see the table above at question 2.

### Question 5

Have any estimates been taken as to how much these crimes have cost the rural economy?

### Answer

The PSNI do not have any recorded information to answer this question as on reporting a crime many farmers do not know the value of the items that have been stolen and it is therefore not possible to accurately gauge the cost of these thefts. In trying to assist, the PSNI have reproduced a table below which was passed to PSNI from NFU Mutual who currently account for 80% of the agricultural insurance market. The table gives their statistics for National Tractor & Machinery Theft.

	2011		2012		2013	
	No of claims	Total Cost £	No of claims	Total Cost £	No of claims	Total Cost £
<b>Total</b>	129	714,016	77	220,464	87	751,307

### Question 6

What sort of rural crimes are the PSNI mostly dealing with?

### Answer

In agricultural crime, the PSNI are dealing with incidents of theft of livestock, machinery, tools and

diesel. The PSNI also respond to reports of suspicious activity of persons or vehicles at farming premises.

### **Question 7**

Has there been an increase in sheep rustling and the theft of farm equipment in these areas?

### **Answer**

a) There has been a decrease of 125 sheep stolen in 11 incidents in 2012 to 38 stolen in 3 incidents in 2013 in the South Down area. In 2013 there were 1,092 sheep reported as stolen to police across all of Northern Ireland and based upon the June 2013 DARD(NI) Agricultural Census this represents 0.057% of the total sheep population.

b) Information has been collated on theft of farm machinery which is comprised of tractor, trailer and quad. There has been an increase from 35 in 2012 to 47 in 2013 in the South Down area.

### **Question 8**

How many arrests have taken place over the last year in relation to rural crime?

### **Answer**

There were 24 arrests in relation to agricultural crime in 2013.

### **Question 9**

Do you know how many of these have led to a court appearance or a prison sentence?

### **Answer**

On average there is a 74% conviction rate for offences in relation to agricultural crime.

### **Question 10**

Is preventing rural crime something the PSNI are actively involved in?

### **Answer**

PSNI understands the impact that crime against the farming community has on farmers, their families, farm workers, their business and the wider rural community and is very aware of the significant contribution of the rural community to a successful Northern Ireland.

Crime against the farming community is relatively rare. Burglary, robbery and theft against farms and farmers accounts for 2.3% of all burglary, robbery and theft offences and 0.8% of all crime across NI.

Through organised rural crime prevention events and informal day to day contact on farms, livestock marts and at UFU offices, Police Officers and Crime Prevention Officers engage with farmers. They encourage farmers to sign up to their local FarmWatch scheme to have their property security marked and to join the FarmWatch rural text alert schemes.

The Rural Crime Partnership is comprised of Department of Justice Community Safety Unit, NFU Mutual Insurance, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and PSNI. In a joint initiative, a Data Analyst has been dedicated to rural crime since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013. Her role is to analyse rural crimes and identify emerging crime trends and crime series. This information is then supplied to Police Commanders in Districts to put in place the operational tactics to prevent and detect rural crime.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference

number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.