

# Cattle Rustling Prevention, Mitigation, and Response



Jefferson County Sheriff's Office

Special thanks to Pat Garrett of the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office , Missouri for use of the materials contained in this document.

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# Cattle Rustlers

Sadly, rather than working like decent human beings there are some that are willing to steal the produce of another person's sweat and blood. Across the country rising price of cattle has led to an increase in cattle rustling. They are also well organized, and they may be armed. They have historically marked gates and fences where they plan to enter with masking tape and trash bags. There may be other markers as well. They most likely have lookouts watching the roads for anyone who may stumble upon them during a theft. Law enforcement and officials believe these are people who work at farms and ranches and therefore familiar with livestock. Nighttime roundups are difficult and requires familiarity with livestock. The following slides will offer advise on how to mitigate theft of your livestock.

Note: They will most likely change their tactics as the public becomes aware of how they operate. Look for additional items on your fences and gates that could be used to mark entrances.

# Theft Prevention

1. Lock gates. Adding padlocks to gates ensures that cattle rustlers must break in. Break ins requires tools and more time than opening a gate. Any amount of additional time on scene increases chances that the rustlers will be caught by a passerby. It also removes any claim that they confusedly entered the wrong field in the dark. Also ensure that gate hinges are capped to prevent easy removal.
2. Reduce ability to cross fence lines. Replace fallen limbs and logs along fence rows. This will force rustlers to use gates or take the time to clear the debris, providing additional time they may be seen. Removal of the blockage may require additional tools and the work to remove may alert people, livestock, and dogs.
3. Coordinate watch with your neighbors. If you have neighbors who work late shifts or stay up late at night, especially high school students and young adults ask them to drive by your fence lines at night to check for break in. Be sure to provide them your phone number to contact you in the event of a break-in.

# Theft Prevention cont.

4. Own a dog. Dogs have been night guardians for centuries. They can hear at far distances, form a long warning chain with neighborhood dogs, and their barking is your best chance to be woken during a cattle theft.
5. Check your fences regularly. Even if you have no tasks to do in a certain area of your farm that day drive/walk along the fence rows to check for break-ins and your markings. Scouts for cattle rustlers have been known to mark planned entry points with masking tape and trash bags. Vary your schedule so that cattle rustlers cannot predict when you will be in your fields.
6. Alert law enforcement to any suspicious vehicles, such as those that may be parked or moving unnaturally slow to allow the occupants to view your cattle and farm, all trucks with cattle trailers at night. Inform law enforcement of any people on foot that seem out of place, overly-interested in your farm, or stop to look at your cattle.

# Threat Prevention cont.

7. Employ full motion video or game cameras if practical. If possible place them where they have good views of gates, fence rows, barn lots, and corrals but cannot be easily seen. Rustlers may steal them if they see them.

Employment of fake cameras or pole mounted cameras not easily reachable where they may be seen may help deter criminals.

8. Ask law enforcement for increased patrolling when you have cattle gathered nights prior to sell. Cattle gathered in barn lots or small fields for easy herding are targets of opportunity for cattle rustlers. You may wish to stay up late, periodically wake up, or coordinate with your neighbors that stay up late to check on your cattle.

9. Keep cattle trailers and trucks where they can be watched, locked up, or illuminated at night. Cattle rustlers often steal trailers and trucks from farmers to use in their operations. Inconspicuously place your driver's license number on your equipment. In the event of theft tell police where to find the number.

# Threat Prevention cont.

10. Lock barns. Rustlers may try to get inside barns for hay or grain to lure the cattle into corrals or trailers.

11. Immobilize corrals. If possible weld your corrals so that criminals cannot steal the panels. They may try to make improvised corrals in fields away from the home to drive cattle into their trailers. Keep extra panels locked up inside a barn.

12. Brand your cattle. Branding cattle can be one of the best deterrents.

13. Create livestock profiles. Ensure you have logs of cattle to include sex and color associated with an ear tag number. Take pictures/video of your livestock. Identify noticeable peculiarities such as odd coloring pattern on the body that law enforcement may identify individual cows by. Log any deformities as well. Include their weight, relative age, and breed.



# Threat Prevention cont.

14. Place alarms on electric fences. Alarms can alert you if the wires have been cut. Even if it is not a cattle rustler that has broken your fence you will be glad to know your cattle may be in the middle of the road or someone else's field.
15. If you have hired hands you may consider night time patrol a part of their duties. Ensure you hire reliable hands.
16. Pay special attention to your cattle during the full moon, before sale days, or periods that have historically been high times for cattle rustling.
17. Be careful about who you speak to, what you say, and where you talk about your farm operations. It is hard to know who to trust and talks in public are often easily overheard.
18. Buy land and cattle close to home. If you can purchase property close to your residence to ensure that you can watch over it. Try to keep herds in the closest properties so you can see them or check on them often and quickly.

# Threat Prevention cont.

19. If possible do not feed livestock in pens. Rustlers may use this to lure animals into pens for roundup.
20. Post signs to restrict trespassing and indicate your farm is protected.
21. Never leave keys in your equipment.
22. Park equipment that can be locked to shield other equipment that may be moved.
23. Install night lights if practical.
24. Ensure load areas are deep inside your land, well seen, and have only one way in and one way out. Time is the enemy of criminals and single access makes it easier to prevent their escape. Hidden loading areas may actually attract criminals.
25. Ask neighbors to watch out for your property if you are going to be away.

# Suspicious Activity Report - Vehicle

Type: Car, Truck, SUV, Trailer, Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Color \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ (If unknown say mid-90s, early 2000s, even newer or older.

Describe general features that might help law enforcement identify such as rounded cab, squared cab).

License Number \_\_\_\_\_

Identifying Marks: \_\_\_\_\_ (headlight out, dent on tail gate, decals or stickers, custom coloring patterns, lifted, lowered, unique sound, extended cab, short bed)

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_ (What was the suspicious vehicle doing?)

Number of occupants: \_\_\_\_\_

# Suspicious Activity- Person

Number of people: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of males: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of females \_\_\_\_\_ Races: \_\_\_\_\_ (white, black, Asian, Indian)

Height: \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_ Type of Clothing: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifying marks: \_\_\_\_\_ (Tattoos, piercings, objects they hold).

Hair color: \_\_\_\_\_

Suspicious activity: \_\_\_\_\_

# Theft Response

1. If you believe a cattle theft is taking place call 9-1-1 and advise them of your suspicion. Investigate your fence lines or the site where you believe the incident is occurring. If possible stay on the line with the dispatcher. If you see vehicles or people in your field inform the sheriff's office immediately. Do not approach cattle rustlers. Take a firearm to protect yourself. Rustlers may be willing to injure or kill you to escape. You may not start shooting at cattle rustlers. You may protect your life if threatened.

2. If you live alone contact a neighbor to go with you. If you have others in your home take others that are competent to protect themselves. Take a phone with you to maintain contact with the police and anyone you leave at home. If you leave someone in your house have them contact your neighbors. Begin alerting other people in the vicinity of your farm. The best response is a massive response to discourage cattle rustlers from attempting to cause you bodily harm.

# Theft Response cont.

3. If cattle rustlers leave the premises before being stopped by law enforcement follow them at a safe distance and maintain contact with law enforcement. Pay attention to your route so that you can appropriately direct the police. Warn officers within the closest cities as well to be aware. They will be able to search roads as well for moving trailers.
4. If you discover a theft has already occurred contact the sheriff's office immediately.

# After a Theft

1. Avoid traveling in the area where the theft occurred so as not to destroy evidence. Only fix the gates and fences when law enforcement has completed their crime scene investigation. If you have to remove remaining cattle to another field do so as least intrusively as possible to mitigate chances of destroying evidence.
2. Provide investigators with as much information on your livestock and anything you saw during the incident as you can.
3. Contact your insurer to see what is needed for follow up and making a claim.
4. Inform fellow farmers of what happened so that they may take precautions for their livestock.



If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at the 541-475-6520.

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