



Have your say

Feel strongly about any of the issues in this week's Opinion section? Or maybe another topic is occupying your mind?

Branding kit can defeat thieves

* I have been a security specialist for 30 years and there are definitely lessons from other industries that could benefit farmers.

If a thief doesn't like the look of your quad bike, or doesn't believe they can make a quick buck from selling it, they are less likely to take it. Who steals a 2001 Datsun Sunny when it's parked next to a 2013 Aston Martin?

It is, therefore, worth thinking about how you can make your farming equipment less attractive to a would-be thief. Take steps that subconsciously shout: "That's my quad bike, hands off."

Yes, you can buy complex vehicle immobilisers and high-tech satellite tracking devices, but this increases your capital expenditure and can only provide part of the solution.

In the first instance, I advocate low cost, simple measures. You could engrave your postcode in prominent places, write your farm name or telephone number on exposed body panels or spot weld your favourite shape on the vehicle chassis. Essentially, create a visual mark that makes your property unique and quickly recognisable.

As my granddad used to say, "In the good-old-days, we used to brand our horses so no one nicked them and, if they got caught, we'd hang-em." I'm not suggesting we bring back capital punishment for nicking a tractor, but there is something in the idea of "branding" your modern-day cart horse. You can go as far as marking your

Laboratory soil testing standards must be given a quality check

* I applaud your initiative in comparing lab results for potato cyst nematode testing (Arable, 5 February).

Having spent the first two years of my research career assessing potato cyst nematode populations before moving to something more interesting (blackgrass), I can understand the challenges faced by the labs.

Coincidentally on the same day (while sorting through old reprints during my office clear-out following my "retirement"), I came across an old study from 1985 in which nine soil samples were analysed for soil organic matter by 10 testing laboratories across the USA.

The labs represented both private and state laboratories attached to major universities. There were highly significant differences between laboratories, with two- to six-fold differences between the lowest and highest organic matter values for each of the nine soils.

Interestingly, there was a ten-

fold difference in consistency, as with your PCN assays, for individual labs to produce consistently high or low results which indicate that differences were not simply random errors.

I am sure such "ring" tests on almost anything would find equally variable results. Indeed, I recall running a herbicide-resistance ring test involving 16 companies and organisations throughout Europe which produced similarly variable results.

There really is a need for more critical comparison between analytical laboratories to ensure consistency. For example, there is growing recognition of the importance of improving soil fertility and reliable measures of soil organic matter are essential as one measure of progress.

However, conducting "ring tests" of labs can be time-consuming, is often not straightforward and there may be little incentive for labs to get involved voluntarily. After all, results may be damaging to their reputation so why take the risk? There is also the

property with commercially available security marking solutions, which create a "forensic DNA" that enables identification of machines and authorised owners.

If you will be looking to sell your machinery on after a few years, then you need to be careful how you mark your property so as not to devalue it and prevent a sale. If, however, you buy it for lifetime use then be bold and consider customising it so it becomes one of a kind; unmistakably yours and something that would be considered out of place anywhere else.

If you choose to customise or overtly mark your equipment, be sure not to alter the qualities of the commercially installed safety devices or negate the terms of your manufacturer's warranty. Theft prevention strategies should also never introduce unacceptable risks to the health of you or those who operate the machinery. Additional vehicle marking advice can be found on the Construction Equipment Security And Registration scheme website and from



Research is vital, but the results need to be reliable.

issue of who pays.

It seems to me that this is an area in which AHDB are well placed to get involved, but such

the Plant & Agricultural National Intelligence Unit.

If you choose to brand your equipment then take a digital photograph and add it to your equipment register – a picture paints a thousand words.

Frank Cannon
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Cross after cross-border BPS delay

* As I write this (5 February), like many others I have yet to receive my BPS payment. As I have land in Wales and England I am a "cross-border" case which I'm led to believe means I'm on the "difficult" pile.

Having had a letter saying I wouldn't be paid before the end of January I thought I should ring this week for an update.



Security experts advise 'branding modern-day workhorses' such as ATVs.