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HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FARM AGAINST ACTIVISTS

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In the wake of an upsurge in vegan activists targeting UK farmers, Farmers and Mercantile Insurance Brokers (FMIB) offers advice on how to protect farms.



New threat to business

UK farmers are adept at insuring themselves against the unpredictability of the Great British weather, theft and damage but a new threat is forcing them to reassess their business cover along with their legal rights.

Animal activists are increasing their activity – both on and offline – with many high-profile demonstrations hitting headline news and dairy farmer’s addresses being published on social platforms, alongside advice about how to access farming properties, stage a demonstration and share it with the world.

It is imperative that farmers understand the dos and don’ts during and following such a demonstration on or near their property or an apparent breach of their privacy. Forewarned is forearmed after all.

Whilst most campaigning will be

carried out peacefully and legally, it can still prove to be a distressing time if you are targeted. Quite often, simply staying calm and politely asking protestors to leave will resolve the matter.

If they agree to leave, try to make a note of the make, model and registration of their vehicles, the date and time of the incident and gather any other evidence, such as personal descriptions and any campaign material which may be useful in the future. But don’t put yourself in harm’s way when doing so.

More aggravated forms of activity could be deemed illegal and it is important that farmers recognise when uninvited visitors have overstepped the mark. Making an official complaint for offences such as aggravated trespass, harassment and breach of the peace may be the only course of action.

Please contact us at your convenience to discuss your requirements



Prevention is better than cure

Take action before such an event takes place. Here we outline ten practical ways you can better protect your farm from activist or extremist activity.

1. Put up clear signs indicating where you do not want the public entering - particularly if you have a diversified farm which means members of the public regularly visit your premises.
2. Install CCTV at vulnerable points throughout the farm and at entrance points hidden from view. Consider investing in a smart camera which allows live streaming via your phone or tablet so you can be vigilant 24/7. You can even choose to receive alerts or text messages when the camera picks up movement.
3. Consider additional security lighting as standard CCTV is of limited use in the dark. Also, be mindful that CCTV footage can only be used as evidence in court if it complies with the Data Protection Act which means it must:
 - Not invade anyone else's privacy.
 - Have visible signs telling people that CCTV is in operation.
 - Only use the footage for the purpose for which it has been taken, such as monitoring any suspicious people on your property. It should not be used for monitoring neighbours or people working in your home.
 - Only keep the footage for as long as it's needed.

4. Use high quality padlocks or security systems to restrict access across your land as long as you are not impinging on a public right of way.
5. Make sure the main farmhouse and all outbuildings are locked and secured at all times – even when you are present.
6. Talk to your neighbours, keep an eye on each other's property and think about joining your local neighbourhood watch scheme.
7. If you have any concerns about your safety or feel under threat, call 999 immediately. It is advisable that you build a relationship with the local police officers, particularly rural crime-assigned officers. Ensuring local police officers are aware of issues will allow them to build a picture and determine the scale of the problem in your area.
8. Familiarise yourself with removing trespasser procedures – for example, according to the law, a police officer can intervene once the occupier has asked trespassers to leave if a person has:

- damaged the land or
- used threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour to the occupier, the occupier's family or employees or
- between them they have 6 or more vehicles on the land

It is also worth noting that failure to obey a direction to leave or returning to the land within 3 months is considered an offence.

9. Ensure you have a recruitment vetting process, including checking school records and references to ensure prospective workers are genuine and not from an activist group or the media hoping to gain information to use against you. This will help protect farmers unknowingly hiring an animal rights activist aiming to infiltrate the farming operation or for 'undercover' operations.
10. Ensure you have malicious damage cover, which can be a lifeline for vulnerable businesses. It helps cover the cost of repairs and replacement items and can also help minimise lost income.



Be aware of other risks

There are also other ways your farm may be at risk without a person even setting foot on your land. Predatory behaviour can also take the form of drone surveillance, fake media interest and malicious phone calls.



In the event of an apparent media enquiry about animal welfare, never comment – simply take the caller's details and a summary of the allegations they are making. You are entitled to see photos or footage and details of when and where the alleged incident has taken place. You should then contact your farm assurance body or follow standard police reporting procedure.

As with a malicious phone call, remain calm and gain as much useful information as possible, never

delete any voicemail messages and if possible, record the call. BT malicious calls bureau (**0800 661 441**) is available for help and advice.

If you suspect a drone is unlawfully over your land you should never attempt to forcibly take the controls from the operator and never shoot down the drone, as both could lead to prosecution. Instead report the incident to the police by calling **101**, unless there is an imminent danger to people or livestock in which case call **999**.

Whether an intrusion on your farm is face-to-face, online, physical or verbal, farmers should never take matters into their own hands. Stay on the right side of the law and minimise the risks associated with animal activism.

FMIB have over 23 years' experience protecting farming businesses including how farmers can prepare themselves for such an infringement.



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For a complimentary review of your insurance needs, highlighting any gaps or unnecessary cover, please contact us.

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