

# Horizon Scanning Rural Crime in the UK during COVID-19

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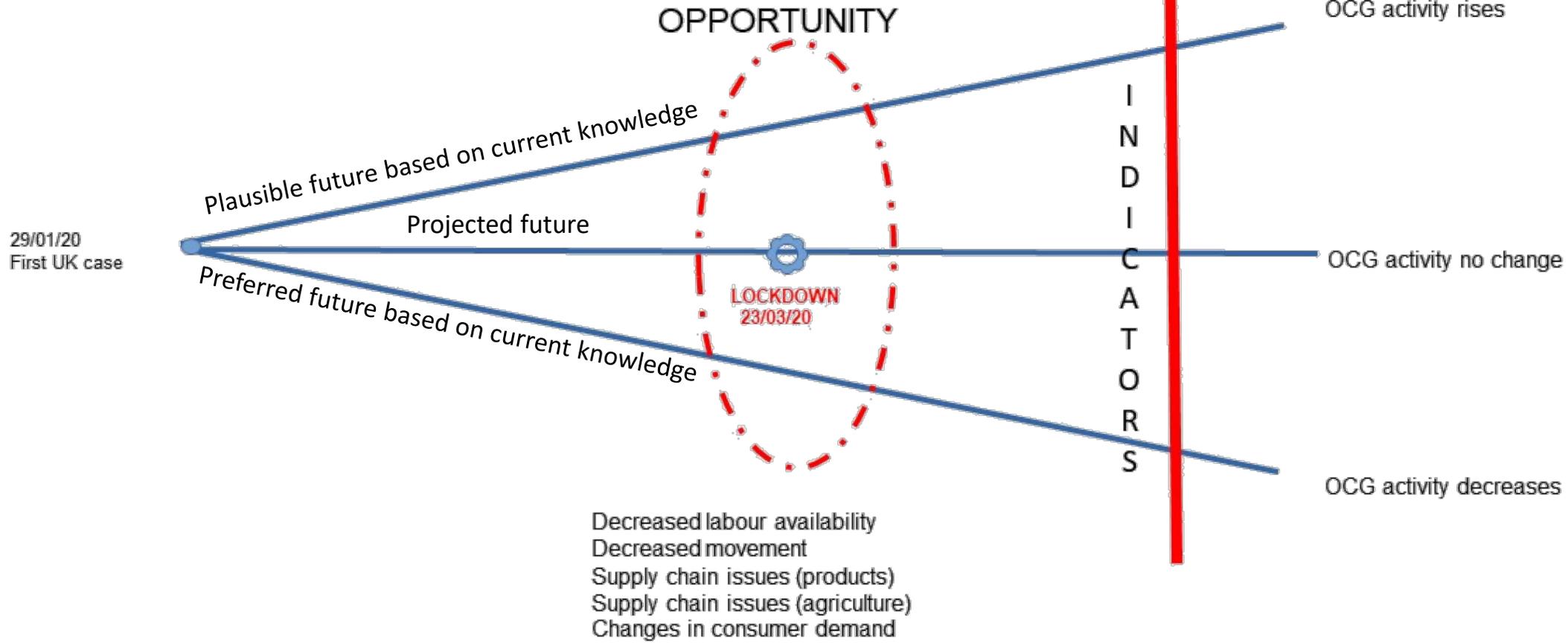
# Introduction

- Horizon scanning research at Harper Adams University to track the impact of OCGs in rural areas during COVID-19
- Based solely on media reports – due to ease of access during lockdown
- Shed light on the increased activity potentially due to OCGs in cases of rural crime across the UK
- Police and other agencies need to think differently about the crimes they are experiencing in their rural communities

# Methodology

- Foresight Research and Horizon Scanning used to identify strategic approach in addressing future issues
- This research uses a Cone of Plausibility approach to establish changes in OCG operations in rural UK during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Enabled via tracking of media reports as the most responsive way of obtaining information of rural criminal activity
- Sheds light on issues of crime prevention, community resilience, and governance in rural areas of the UK

Trafficked people  
Agricultural theft  
Illegal meat market activity  
Counterfeit Crop Protection products  
Drug supply



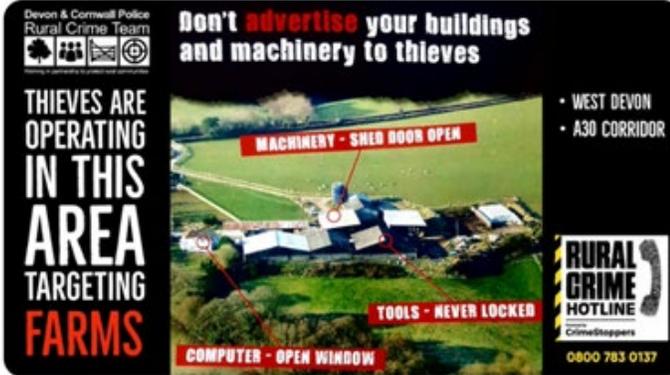
# Tracking OCG activities

- UK-wide media reports from general and farming press can provide a national view of patterns and issues arising so that recommendations can be made

**Dr Kreseda Smith**  
1,551 Tweets

**Rural Affairs - Devon** @DCPoliceRural\_D · Aug 25  
There has been an increase in #theft from #farms in #WestDevon, targeting light equipment, #FarmMachinery & ATVs. Please consider your security measures.

- Secure your #quadbike/#atv
- 📷 quads & machinery
- Note down serial numbers
- Lock your outbuildings
- Report sus activity



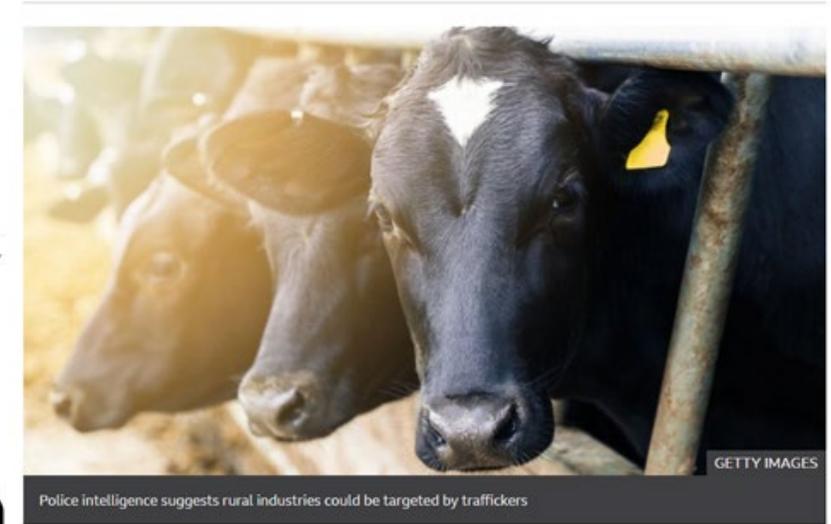
South West Farmer and 9 others

2 10 14

**Dr Kreseda Smith** @FarmCrimePhD · Aug 26  
Indicative of organised crime groups operating in rural areas. This needs to be considered as an option by police instead of numerous opportunistic thefts

## Human traffickers 'diversifying into agriculture'

13 June



Police intelligence suggests rural industries could be targeted by traffickers

Police have warned human traffickers could be turning their attention to more rural industries with many urban businesses currently closed.

They said intelligence suggested agriculture, fisheries and forestry could be areas being targeted.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-53036007>

# Effect of OCG activities: Crime Prevention

- Many crime prevention tactics are based on theoretical models but needs to be more proactive and adaptable to address the ever-changing OCG crime patterns
- Better use of community-driven crime prevention options

## Organised farm gangs cause spike in cost of rural crime

By Kevin Keane  
BBC Scotland's rural affairs correspondent

© 4 August 2020

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Sheep farmer Andrew Houstoun from Perthshire fell victim to thieves in November who stole a quad bike worth about £8,000

The cost of rural crime in Scotland has risen by 44% with organised gangs targeting farm machinery, a report says.

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-Scotland-53641209](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-Scotland-53641209)

# Effect of OCG activities: Community Resilience

- Rural communities in the UK already feel like second-class citizens when it comes to crime
- OCGs negatively affecting rural ontological security?
- Rural service providers must enable communities to be more resilient – formal and informal responses that are efficient and effective

## Police report spike in rural crime during Covid-19 crisis



Farmers are being warned to take every precaution to protect their machinery, equipment and livestock, as reports come in from around the country of thieves targeting farms during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Car thieves are said to be turning their attention to the countryside as their usual revenue streams dry up, according to NFU Mutual. Rural affairs specialist Rebecca Davidson said: "Our agricultural vehicle specialists, who work closely with the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service and police forces across the UK, are reporting high levels of agricultural vehicle and machinery thefts across the board."

# Effect of OCG activities: Governance

- Police strategy is inadequate nationally to address the impact OCGs have on rural communities
- The persistence of 'silo' working style among law enforcement agencies leads to poor intelligence sharing and lack of ownership

## Call for more action to protect farms against rural crime wave

By [Dominic Robertson](#) | [Crime](#) | Published: Aug 4, 2020

As a new report shows that rural crime cost the county more than £1.4 million last year, a farmer has said more needs to be done to protect rural businesses.

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[www.shropshirestar.com/news/crime/2020/08/04/call-for-more-action-to-protect-farms-against-rural-crime-wave/](http://www.shropshirestar.com/news/crime/2020/08/04/call-for-more-action-to-protect-farms-against-rural-crime-wave/)

# Conclusions

- OCGs are true criminal entrepreneurs – very much market driven
- Much more reactive, leaving crime prevention and governance slow to react = communities are left behind
- Foresight research can provide some assistance in trying to plan ahead allowing for strategic planning based on academic research but also practitioner experience
- Need to end the silo approach to the governance and response to rural crime in light of the targeting by OCGs

Thank you for  
your time.

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Source: <https://www.cravenherald.co.uk/news/18627907.covid-19-sparks-rise-rural-crime/>