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# Confronting Social Constructions of Rural Criminality: A Case Story on ‘Illegal Pluriactivity’ in the Farming Community

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The accepted social construction of the rural criminal is that of the (alien) urban marauder. In this social script the farmer is often presented as the victim of crime. Traditionally, farmers enjoy high levels of social esteem and rarely are they vilified. The stereotype of the farmer is that of a jovial, kindly, hard working and industrious individual. However, farmers are not a homogenous group and a minority are dishonest and even cruel. As a socio-economic activity in which profit margins are shrinking in some sectors, farming as an activity can exert significant pressures to financially break even and survive. Within the Farming Community, there exists a grudging admiration for those with the ability to generate alternative incomes – not all of them legal. Building upon a previous study into ‘Rural Rogues’ this case story examines alternative income generating strategies from the margins of agriculture which include theft of animals and property; engaging in the illegal meat trade; trading in illegal medicines and wildlife and dog breeding. The farmer turned criminal-entrepreneur operates across legal and illegal domains and an anti-authority attitude is embedded in the *modus operandi*. The farmer is part of a wider entrepreneurial network which exploits an alternative shadow work economy. This case using ethnographic observation examines the activities of such individuals and documents the phenomenon of an indigenous rural criminal fraternity in Scotland.

**Key/Words:** Farm Entrepreneurship, Illegal pluriactivity; Illegal entrepreneurship; Farm crime.

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# **Confronting Social Constructions of Rural Criminality: A Case Story on ‘Illegal Pluriactivity’ in the Farming Community**

## **1. Introduction**

The socially constructed nature of rurality and rural identities is an ongoing debate in rural sociology (for example see Halfcree, 1993; Liepins, 2000; Phillips, Fish and Agg, 2001; Askins, 2009; Bye, 2009; Duenckmann, 2010; Stenbacka, 2011). A significant component of this debate relates to the socially constructed nature of rural masculinities as well as constructions of the rural (Bye, 2009; Stenbacka, 2011) in which rural men are characterized by tough guy images and deviant identities. However, in contrast the discursive problematization of the socially constructed nature of rural criminality is visible by its absence (Hoggt and Carrington, 1998; Smith, 2010) yet there has been some work on rural crime and rural policing (e.g. Yarwood and Edwards 1995; Yarwood, 2000; Yarwood, 2001; Yarwood, 2005; Mawby, 2004; and Yarwood and Mawby, 2010; Smith, 2010). This is not a topic that has attracted a lot of sociological enquiry. The discursive absence of the farmer as criminal is an issue of sociological interest which has yet to be properly addressed. This then is the focus of the article.

Traditionally, and symbolically, farmers enjoy high levels of social capital. Like the entrepreneur, they are ascribed dual status of hero and loner. Indeed, they are framed as a breed of men apart from society, exacerbated by an artificial division extant between the worlds of farming and business. This problematizing of farmers as men replicates patriarchal ideology of farming highlighted by Saugeres (2002a; 2002b):

but with patriarchy comes masculinity and often deviance. However, farmers are not a homogenous group (McElwee 2006b, 2008). In former times, farming was 'vocation' whilst it has now become a business. This dichotomy can cause friction between the dual identity positions of farmer and entrepreneur. Following Isaac, we regard farmers 'As characters [who] are developed through "novel time," readers come to identify with key figures, maybe ignore some, and become repulsed by yet others (2008. 389).

Moreover, farming as a socio-economic activity is valorised within a countryside viewed through a distorting lens that is the rural idyll (Mingay, 1989). Indeed, rurality *per se* is thus infused by Tönnies notions of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887). In keeping with the hagiographic imagery associated with this idyll - the popular, bucolic, stereotype of the farmer is of a jovial, kindly, hard working and industrious individual but not all farmers are virtuous and some are dishonest (Smith, 2004). These 'rogue' farmers are of interest as they are internal actors within the farming community as opposed to external, often urban based actors, who interact with the community. This article is of interest from criminological, entrepreneurial and sociological perspectives insofar as it highlights an ingrained criminal subculture embedded within farming communities. Yet, it is hidden from the external gaze and is milieu normally policed by a variety of official organisation such as (in the UK) Trading Standards, Food Standards Agency, Royal Society Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Ministry Vets and Animal Health Officers (Smith, 2010). As such it is seldom visible to the public. To observe these rogues in action one has to have direct access to or be in a privileged position to observe critically from the sidelines.

This article is a continuation of the work of [author obscured]. Some of the individuals described in this paper were engaged in the activities narrated in the earlier study. In Smith (2004) ‘the network’, a ‘loose knit’ group of farmers and associates who exploited the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis by engaging in the illegal slaughter of sheep for the Muslim ‘Halal’ market were encountered. This paper continues the examination of these rural rogues who use their social capital and position in the legitimate farming community to create and extract value from their environment (Anderson, 1995). However, in this article examines the criminal behaviour of the farmer. Criminal acts are all unified by the concept of illegal pluriactivity<sup>3</sup> because they are provide alternative income generation strategies through which farmers supplement their legitimate incomes. Nevertheless, as individuals they retain their status as farmers not criminals. This article narrates the activities of the network over time providing further insights into a continuing entrepreneurial trajectory. It is in effect a longitudinal study which enriches our understanding of the settings in which entrepreneurship can flourish as well as providing an unusual example of the enactment of ‘criminal-entrepreneurship’ (Smith, 2009; Gottschalk, 2009).

The paper has five parts. Section 2 conducts a literature review of farm crime through the lens of entrepreneurship to identify salient key themes and in particular develops an argument for flexible moralities in farming. Section 3 discusses methodology and ethics and presents the case study proper. Section 4 synthesises the material placing it in context whilst section 5 provides a conclusion and identifies implications and limitations to the study.

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<sup>3</sup> Pluriactivity is defined as any business activity which the farmer engages in which is off-farm activity. Diversification is defined as on-farm or farming-related activity. Thus, contracting or Farm accommodation would constitute diversification. Contracting or working in another occupation would constitute pluriactivity.

## **2.0. Farm crime as viewed through the lens of entrepreneurship**

In this section, we carry out a literature review of criminal behaviour designated as 'Farm-Crime' but viewed through the lens of the entrepreneurship literature and in particular entrepreneurial behaviour. Farm crime includes crimes committed against and by the farming community. Extant research into crime in rural areas has been sporadic. Clinard (1944) researched the neglected subject of the rural criminal offender suggesting that such offenders experience a delayed onset of criminal behaviour in comparison to urban offender's. Clinard (1942) argued that rural offenders possessed greater mobility than urban offenders. Nevertheless, actual studies relating to criminality in a rural context are rare but include studies relating to subsidy frauds (Passas and Nelken, 1993) and poaching (Forsyth and Marckese, 1993). Donnermeyer (undated) points out that rural crime, like urban crime, is a product of culture, persistent poverty and rapid social change which can weaken local community norms; whilst Cloke and Davies (1992) highlight deprivation as being a facet of rural living. Barclay *et al* (2004) even suggest that the *Gemeinschaft* like qualities within rural communities encourage crime. These issues are important because rural crime is considered as being different. We begin by assessing the prevalence of crime in rural locations as highlighted in extant research. Thereafter consideration is given to the possibility of an existence of a rural criminal class before discussing entrepreneurial behaviour within the farming community and its linkages with criminal activities. The section concludes by considering environmental influences affecting entrepreneurial proclivity of farmers.

### **2.1. Assessing the prevalence of rural crime:**

Research into crime in rural locations remains somewhat sketchy with clusters of isolated studies in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. The studies of Anderson (1997 and 1999) are directly relevant because they were conducted in Scotland where this case study is set. A small scale study by Sugden (1999) reported that farmers were affected by increasingly high levels of crime and highlighted high levels of crime unsuspected by the farmers themselves. The study carried out across Scotland in 1999 by George Street Research highlighted a similar problem, indicating that

- Farmers reported commercial crime ranging from fire-raising; housebreaking; livestock rustling; theft, of machinery, gates, all-terrain-vehicles, fuel, fencing and tools.
- Thefts from farms are a recurring problem but rustling was the highest cost crime per incident to farmers.
- The highest levels of farm crime were those nearer large urban conurbations whereas farmers living in remote locations experienced the lowest levels of crime.
- The average cost of these incidents was £1,400 but only a small percentage of farmers who were victims of crime reported financial losses as a consequence.

The research concludes that farm crime is under reported because farmers believe the crime to be 'trivial' or doubted the ability of the police to resolve it. Significantly, Anderson's study (1997) indicates the main problem in Scotland is the theft of livestock. Notably, sheep rustling is still a significant issue. For example, in Lincolnshire in October 2011, 3000 sheep were rustled. The George Street study was seminal because it unearthed information unlikely to emerge from published rural crime figures. Nevertheless, those researching farm crime have often to rely heavily



upon anecdotal evidence from respondents and in particular informants, who understandably wish to remain anonymous.

Barclay (2001) highlighted an increase in rural crime in Australia. Barclay describes agricultural crime as a unique and complex phenomenon threatening to undermine the cohesiveness of rural communities. Amongst the crimes highlighted by Barclay was the theft of tools and equipment, fuel, agricultural machinery; and livestock. Mirroring the Scottish study, Barclay (2001: 60) reports apathy amongst farmers to report crime to the police and that the police complained of a '*code of secrecy among farmers in rural communities*' which denies them access to information required to interdict offenders. Apparently, some farmers withhold information fearing retribution from within their communities. Barclay *et al* (2004) expanded research into the code of secrecy amongst farmers; whilst Donnermeyer and Barclay (2005) highlight policing and crime prevention problems within the physical, social, and cultural situation of rural communities.

Research into rural crime tends to concentrate on the typologies of crimes committed and not upon the profile of the individuals concerned in the commission of the crimes. A strong theme to emerge is a belief amongst farmers and country folk that farm crime is carried out by marauding criminals and vandals from urban areas. Indeed, Swanson, Chamelin and Territo, (2000) claim that predatory urban-based criminals frequently plan and perpetuate crimes in rural areas, including those on farms. Likewise, Donnermeyer (undated) argues that rural communities blame the migration of urban criminals into the countryside for the increase in crime but that crimes are often committed by locals. Indeed, Anderson (1999) also found evidence of this widespread belief that crime in rural communities is committed by outsiders. The existence of a predatory criminal class embedded within the farming community

does not fit with the thesis of the urban marauder. Rural communities obviously favour this alien conspiracy theory. Thus Marshall and Johnson (2005: 50) ask the question '*who commits crime in rural areas*'? In doing so, they question whether the majority of crime is committed by those who live within the area, or by travelling criminals. We will return to this important point later in the paper.

Nevertheless, Barclay (2001) shows how the notion of offenders being embedded in the farming community can lead to rifts and feelings of social isolation amongst victims. Barclay *et al* (2004) argue that in rural communities there are informal social norms tolerating certain types of crime. Thus many victims of crime suffer in silence feeling a pressure to conform, 'keep the peace' and avoid making accusations. One argument used to explain the low crime rates in rural areas is that of '*density of acquaintanceship*' (Freudenburg, 1986). This may also explain why farmers are reluctant to report farm crime or rogues within their midst. This augments the existence of an indigenous rural criminal class.

## 2.2. Acknowledging the existence of a rural criminal class:

Traditionally, studies into the criminal underclass focus on urban communities and working class communities. Socio-anthropological studies such as those by Hobbs (1988) and Samuel (1981) highlight the entrepreneurial nature of urban working class crime. However, despite the foundation studies of Clinard (1942: 1944) rarely has consideration been given to an indigenous criminal subculture in rural communities. Berg and DeLisi (2005) argue that research into the criminal career paradigm has essentially ignored rural areas and that rural criminal careers are characterized by relatively few arrests and short-lived criminal justice system involvements. Rural communities are characterized by exceedingly low crime rates and rural career criminals are considered to be relatively harmless in comparison to

habitual offenders in urban areas. In a rural and farming location what constitutes criminality will be socially constructed by those who live there. According to Engdahl (2008) the need to earn money is a significant driver in economic crime. It also lies at the root of much entrepreneurial behaviour *per se*.

### 2.3. Pluriactivity and entrepreneurial behaviour within the farming community:

Interest in farm based and agricultural entrepreneurship is expanding as evidenced by the texts of Laquinto and Spinelli (2006); Sharma, Tiwari and Sharma, 2010); and Alsos, Carter and Ljunggren (2011). However, the arguments in this paper revolve around Alistair Anderson's definition of entrepreneurship as '*the creation and extraction of value from an environment*' (Anderson, 1995) which is significant because in farming environments value cannot be measured in purely monetary terms. For many farmers, making substantial profits is not feasible due to falling profit margins. To overcome this, 'diversification' has become a viable entrepreneurial strategy for farmers.

There is a significant literature on farm diversification based around the practice of 'Pluriactivity' (Carter, 1996; Carter, 1998; Carter, 1999; Eikeland (1999); Alsos *et al*, 2003; and Carter *et al*, 2004). Carter (1996) argues that agriculture is excluded in the literature despite pluriactivity being prevalent in all farm sizes and in all areas. Moreover, Carter (1998) links portfolio entrepreneurship and pluriactivity arguing that studies into its practice in farming have focused on farm-centred diversification, rather than the wider entrepreneurial activities open to farmers. Many farmers have multiple business interests which make a substantial contribution to both numbers of enterprises and employment creation thus it makes sense to consider pluriactivity in the wider business activities of farm owners. Carter *et al* (2004) enquires into multiple income sources and potential income revenue streams in farming

communities. This ‘cobbling together’ of a variety of income sources to sustain themselves is a feature of subsistence entrepreneurship in rural areas (Smith, 2006). Eikeland (1999) refers to the notion of a new rural pluriactivity arguing that the income of a majority of rural entrepreneurs is obtained by running more than one small-scale industrial enterprise or by mixing operating enterprises with ordinary paid work. The purpose of this strategy is to exploit new niches in the rural economy. As has been argued these opportunities are shaped by modern gender relations in rural communities.

However, existing studies into pluriactivity relate only to legal forms of entrepreneurship. In light of the assertion of Coleman (1992: 831) that crime is just another strategy in a game where the benefits outweigh the risks, it is relevant to ask whether illegal forms of entrepreneurship could be accommodated under the rubric of pluriactivity? Meert *et al* (2005) argue that on marginal farms sustainability is improved via a broad range of survival strategies, closely interlinked and embedded in the household structure of typical family farms although they do not consider the possibility of illegal income streams. Another important element of entrepreneurship and thus pluriactivity relates to the use of social capital (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). In the operationalization of entrepreneurial and pluriactive behavior it is usual for farmers to make use of their existing skill sets and social capital.

This lack of consideration of illegal pluriactivity is important because as Aidis and Van Praag (2007) suggest, a positive relationship between entrepreneurs' business performance and their conventional human capital as measured by previous business experience is relevant. Unusually, Aidis and Van Praag do seek to examine whether illegal entrepreneurship experience (IEE), as an unconventional form of human

capital, is related to the performance and motivation of entrepreneurs operating legal businesses. Their research partially supports the notion that prior experience in the hidden economy may signal and provide valuable human capital for legal enterprising. In this paper we examine the significance of IEE to entrepreneurial proclivity amongst rogue farmers and the extent to which entrepreneurial proclivity is affected by environmental influences.

#### 2.4. Environmental influences affecting entrepreneurial proclivity:

For some farmers extracting value from an environment can be difficult because of soil fecundity, which differs from farm to farm. According to Donnermeyer (undated) rural areas and farm practice are diverse. Indeed, Maskell *et al* (1998: 1) argue that geographic and topographic factors of the land determine opportunity; and Dudley (2003) that economic dislocation affects financial viability. Sachs (1973) regards the farmer as an important autonomous actor within the rural economy and uses as simple dichotomy, the farmer entrepreneur as being creative or non-creative who base their decision-making on reflections and experiences using standardized rules of thumb (or norms). Sachs argues that numerous behaviour-patterns, formed by the socialisation process, largely determine the economic actions of owner-entrepreneurs. In particular, Sachs identifies risk-taking propensity as being vital to entrepreneurial success but argues that it may be influenced by hereditary and environmental factors.

For Malecki (2006) the 'lives and livelihoods' of entrepreneurs in rural contexts are embedded in their socio-economic circumstances. These factors perhaps explain why some farmers adopt a cynical and cunning single-minded pursuit of money. Such farmers often also fit the cultural stereotype of the "*bad farmer*" as articulated by Nerlich *et al* (undated).

Research into the integrity and moral character of farmers and the ethics of farming is sparse. One exception is the work of Schoon and te Grotenhuis (2000) who conducted research into the values of farmers in relation to sustainability and their differential levels of motivation driving conduct and choices in farming practice. The research indicates that many farmers are highly moral and follow the moral script of being a 'good farmer' whilst others adopt a more pragmatic style. Schoon and te Grotenhuis argue that for the so called 'good' farmers personal values over ride economic considerations.

According to Saugeres (2002a) there is a discourse in farming which embodies the inherited relationship between the farmer and the land whereby 'good farmers' possesses an innate understanding of nature. This sympathetic feel for the land is often associated with traditional farming. Saugeres argues that conversely, the alienated and exploitative attitude of the 'bad farmer' towards nature is associated with modern agriculture and agribusiness. Thompson (1995) identifies three competing worldviews or ideologies which farmers constantly struggle with namely - productionism, economics and stewardship. The first two often conflict with stewardship which Thompson suggests has traditionally been the main concern of farmers. Nevertheless, stewardship can have negative connotations giving rise to consideration of the farmer as a rule breaker, as acts of stewardship in difficult financial situations give rise to consideration of cutting corners and rule bending. This can pose a dilemma. Indeed, Lowe (1997) talks of the recent moralization of the environment and considers the possibility of farmers being wrongdoers within their community.

Indeed, Hart (2005) refers to the concept of '*moral hazard*' in an agricultural environment; whilst Vesala *et al* (2007) consider the possibility that some farmers

have a propensity to cheat. Nevertheless, Vesala *et al* conclude that the majority of farmers are overwhelmingly honest. Dudley (2003) links morality to entrepreneurial self-identity suggesting that the values of the "*entrepreneurial self*" are based around morality which is central to the construction of entrepreneurial identity in a farming context. Furthermore, Dudley argued that the moral identity of farmers is determined by their obligation on how well they measure up to community standards whilst proving themselves worthy of their inheritance from their farming ancestors. The world inhabited by farmers such as those whom we encounter in this case story is socially constructed as a very masculine world in which toughness and hardness of character is very much a part (Brandth, 1995; Coldwell, 2010). So what are these issues of morality in rural locations that underpin entrepreneurial behaviour?

Rural moralities play a part in the social construction of rural masculinities (Coldwell, 2010). Indeed, Trauger, Sachs, Barbercheck, Keiman, Brasier and Schartzberg (2010) refer to the "authentic farmer". This suggests that notions of farming identity are based around social constructions and Weberian ideal types. Trauger *et al* identifies certain types of farmers and farming as authentic, while certain types of farms are seen as inauthentic and that this script feeds into institutional discourses on rurality. Moreover, Saugeres (2002b) explores the cultural constructions of masculinities amongst farming families and identified the tractor as a technological masculine symbol of power to construct and reaffirm their masculine identities. These studies highlight the inherent flexible morality of farming. Frustratingly, much of what we know about the flexible morality of farming comes to us in anecdotal form. Therefore, the remainder of the article is directed towards answering the following research questions:

- Is there an indigenous 'criminal class' within the farming community?

- If so can it be regarded as a rural entrepreneurial underclass?
- How does this influence e our understanding of rural social constructs of crime and entrepreneurship?

These questions are framed in the context of a flexible morality in farming.

### **3.0. On Methodology, ethics, storytelling and telling stories**

This section provides a rigorous methodological discussion on the role and place of 'anecdote' in this type of narrative. We briefly discuss issues of methodology and ethics prior to presenting the case story proper. The primary methodology used is that of the case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002) or more precisely the case story approach (Smith, 2004). This approach is used as a legitimate research strategy or empirical inquiry investigating a phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 1981).

As discussed above much of our knowledge of rural crime and criminality is derived from anecdotes and stories or from ethnographic observation. Many of these observations and anecdotes illustrate morality as a flexible commodity enacted in rural environments where the extracting of value from an environment is part and parcel of rural life. Such anecdotes act as a springboard from which one can begin to understand how the cultures of silence and illegality in farming circles can take root, becoming in effect an open secret. The anecdotes lead us to consider issues of methodology, ethics, storytelling or more precisely telling stories. In this study, we collected stories from informants we knew in rural location through other research activities or occupations. Many of these individuals preferred to remain anonymous. They were willing to talk to us if we could protect their identity as informants. Our presence in the rural community allowed us to conduct a type of “backyard ethnography” (Heley, 2011).



We then subjected the anecdotal information and stories to social network analysis (Boissevain and Mitchell, 1973; Scott, 1988; Scott, 1994; Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Cross, Borgatti and Parker, 2002; and Carrington, Scott and Wasserman, 2005) of a type more routinely used in criminal intelligence circles to analyse connections between criminal networks (Sparrow, 1991; Klerks, 1999). As an analytic technique in intelligence work, network analysis helps identify vulnerabilities in criminal organizations (Sparrow, 1991). Sophisticated network analysis methods help investigators identify positions of power and to attribute these to specific individual traits or to structural roles that these individuals fulfil within networks (Klerks, 1999). The purpose of social network analysis is to make the invisible, visible (Cross, Borgatti and Parker, 2002). Social Network analysis has a long history in sociology particularly in relation to the analysis of deviant networks (Scott, 1988). Nevertheless, studies of networking are rare in rural studies. Lee, Árnason, Nightingale and Shucksmith (2005) argue that consideration of issues such as social capital and networking can help us understand the dynamics of and relationships between rural social capital and identity.

The case is based upon information-oriented sampling using direct ethnographic observation, conversation, anecdote and stories. Anecdotes are helpful in testing hypotheses and research questions. Its anecdotal nature obviously aligns it to naturalistic observation (Robson, 2002) because the subjects were either observed directly in their natural habitats and environment or from anecdotal stories told about them by others. Naturalistic observation is a technique used to collect behavioural data in real-life situations and works best when little is known of the matter under consideration. Unobtrusive methods (Webb *et al*, 1966; Lee, 2000) do not disrupt the natural research setting and involve indirect gathering of data as opposed to the direct

elicitation of data from respondents. This case story is based upon a network of criminal-entrepreneurs known to the authors. As a precaution pseudonyms have been used and in some cases the characters are based upon composites of several ideal typical characters. Although we have chosen to use the case story methodology we could have constructed a similar (but less qualitatively rich) case study from material from newspaper cuttings which are a matter of public record using documentary research (Scott, 1991). From such observations we constructed the case story.

### 3.1. Farmers, entrepreneurs and thieves – a case story:

#### **The Network**

Key characters - Gordon; Robbie; Stevie; Davie; Colin

Gordon was a key player in the network being active in the illegal slaughter of sheep for the Halal market. During 2005-2007 this trade became less lucrative and other illegal activities took precedence. Members of the network still engage in the trade but sporadically. Gordon fell out with other business partners and contacts and developed closer ties with another dishonest farmer – Robbie who was involved in the original enterprise. Gordon became friends with Stevie and his wife who lived on a croft and kept sundry farm animals as pets. Stevie was an ageing rural hippy and worked as a lorry driver and regularly drives through the countryside where he can spot illegal opportunities. Stevie has alcohol dependency issues and had met Gordon in a local public house. Together Gordon, Robbie and Stevie engage in illegal activities such as

- The theft of sheep
- Theft of red diesel and its use in their vehicles
- The theft of metal farm gates
- The sale of out of date animal medicines
- The sale of exotic animals / wildlife as pets
- The breeding of pedigree dogs for sale

At the local pub Gordon also met Davie an ex-farm worker and country boy. Davie developed heroin and alcohol addiction rendering him unemployable. He turned to crime and thieving. Davie targeted isolated farms and business including agricultural merchants. Because of his addiction he associated with other thieves from a nearby urban town including Colin and Jamie. Colin was also raised in the countryside and regularly preyed on rural areas breaking into houses, stealing fuel, stealing scrap metal, farm tools and other portable property. Colin and Jamie are not part of Gordon and Robbie's network but Davie takes part in the thefts of vehicles, fuel and gates with Gordon, Robbie and Stevie and helps reset stolen property. As a thief, Davie works alone but trades information on targets to Gordon.

Gordon played the role of entrepreneur travelling the length and breadth of Britain in search of deals, sourcing the goods and setting up the deals. Many of these deals are semi-legitimate in that Gordon acts as a middleman and broker for other people in arranging 'off the books' deals. Gordon either takes a cut or buys the property cheaply. Gordon moved in with Stevie and Julie and used the croft as a base for his activities. Gordon had the contacts and the intricate knowledge of a nationwide network of rogue farmers prepared who operate on a 'no questions' asked basis. Nonetheless, Robbie is also a crafty entrepreneur. In terms of modus operandi, Gordon is a peripatetic entrepreneur, whereas Robbie is a static entrepreneur using his farm as his base whereas Gordon lives out of his Transit van when on the road. Stevie merely makes up the numbers. Gordon and Robbie are equals whilst Stevie and Davie played a lesser role providing information and contacts.

Gordon comes from a farming background and was raised on a hill farm. Making a living in such marginal farming environments can be difficult and he helped out on the farm and took odd jobs when

these opportunities availed themselves. He operates via 'cash in hand transactions' and is adept at arranging deals. In his early thirties he moved to Scotland to farm but the croft was too small to provide a decent living. He was unable to make ends meet and the bank foreclosed on him. Dealing on the side became necessary and through his contacts he acted as a middleman, a negotiator and arbitrator of other people's deals brokering a cut of the profit. Gordon bought a small lorry and a transit vans and acted as an illegal haulage operator undercutting legal haulage businesses. He cut costs by using red diesel which he either stole or bought from other farmers. He does not have a licence or insurance and if stopped by the police he provides false details. He led a charmed life roving the length and breadth of the country dealing and is regarded by peers as an outlaw figure and a loveable-rogue. He has several women friends and uses their homes as places to rest when travelling.

Robbie had inherited the marginal family hill farm he was born and raised on. It was a mixed farm of 200 acres of sour land. Robbie had learned from his father to be frugal and not to spend money unnecessarily. Thus he seldom taxed or insured his vehicles and would run them on red diesel. Money was tight. His farm buildings are falling into disrepair and the farm neglected. When vehicles break down they were left to rust. Robbie is not a "flash individual" and wears working clothes, a cloth flat cap and Wellington boots giving the countenance of a down at heel farmer. This belied his true financial status as he always has a "wad of readies". His family helped on the farm for no wages. They lived from the land and his legitimate farming income went through the books which usually balanced and no more. Robbie's measures his worth in terms of portable wealth and is aggressive and uncooperative towards any of the authorities who intrude. This is a gangster tactic to ensure he is allowed freedom to operate. He leaves a vehicle parked at the end of the farm road to prevent unwelcome visitors.

Robbie developed an illegal enterprise as puppy farmer. It is a profitable niche market with pedigree puppies selling for £600 - £1,000 depending upon breed. The puppies are kept in poor conditions and no extra money is expended on animal welfare such as clean bedding. Those engaged in this trade care little for the welfare of the animals. Robbie advertised the pups for sale in newspapers out of the county in which he lives reducing the risks of being caught. The theft and the illegal dog breeding provided him with extra untaxed income to continue subsisting.

### 3.2. Using network analysis to make sense of anecdotes:

There also exists in some farming circles an anti-establishment attitude (them v us) towards those charged with implementing statutes which govern farming practices (Barclay, 2001; Barclay, Donnermeyer and Jobes, 2004). Indeed, farmers are a tight knit group of individuals with their own moral code and consequently it appears that many find it difficult to inform on their own kind to the authorities. Klerks (1999) discusses the changing nature of criminal networks to encompass new and more sophisticated paradigmata, such as the enterprise metaphor and the concept of fluid social networks.

Having narrated the case it is necessary to use analytic techniques to make sense of the stories. In the following section we will conduct an analysis of the stories using

a network analysis diagram. The diagram acts as a pictorial representation of the links between the individuals and in particular their income generation streams. In the following section we will also seek to determine whether the activities of the network are entrepreneurial or not?

#### **4.0. Farming, entrepreneurship and theft – an analysis**

In this section we conduct an analysis of the material presented above and align the disparate spheres of farming, entrepreneurship and theft to seek to answer the research questions detailed above. In particular we are concerned with the question of whether members of ‘the network’ can be labelled as entrepreneurs, making it necessary to understand the concept of the entrepreneurial-farmer (McElwee, 2006).

##### 4.1. In search of the entrepreneurial farmer:

There is an emerging debate as to whether farmers, as a genre, are entrepreneurial or not. Some argue that farmers are biased against entrepreneurship per se. In seeking to determine whether or not Robbie or Gordon are entrepreneurs it is necessary to turn to the work of Baumol (1999) because their activities replicate the behaviors normally associated with entrepreneurs. Incisively, Baumol (1999) argued that while the total supply of actual entrepreneurs varies among societies, the productive contribution of their entrepreneurial activities varies much more because of their allocation between productive and unproductive activities. For Baumol crime could be accommodated under the rubric of unproductive or destructive entrepreneurship permitting criminal behaviour to be viewed as a subset of entrepreneurial behaviour. Thus Baumol’s alludes to issues of character in suggesting that not all entrepreneurial activity is lawful and that some entrepreneurs have a disregard for ethics, morality and legalities.

On Baumol's scale of entrepreneurship it is difficult to accurately situate the activities of individual members of 'the network'. Legally and morally many of their activities such as theft are undoubtedly destructive to the wider farming communities in which they operate. However other illegal acts may be unproductive, whilst yet others are productive and legitimate actions. Moreover, some members of 'the network' can be considered entrepreneurial because they take controlled risks and operate in a closed environment in which they exercise a considerable degree of control. The crimes they commit are low level and if interdicted they are unlikely to face a custodial sentence. Nor are they likely to face public censure or the stigma of criminality. Other behavioural aspects associated with entrepreneurship also have explanatory power in determining whether individual farmers are entrepreneurial or not. For example, McElwee (2006) alludes to the fact that the entrepreneurial farmer is perhaps more strategically aware than other farmers and indeed lists ten competitive change strategies open to farmers. See table 1 below:-

**Table 1 – Competitive Change Strategies open to Farmers**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Growth by expansion of land use</li> <li>2. Growth by expansion of animal production</li> <li>3. Enlarging capacity and adding value by vertical integration</li> <li>4. External business</li> <li>5. Cooperation with other farmers</li> <li>6. Diversification</li> <li>7. Migrate into non agricultural employment</li> <li>8. Different use of capacity by specialisation</li> <li>9. Leave farming</li> <li>10. Do nothing.</li> </ol>
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(Source – Adapted from McElwee, 2006:26)

In the circumstances, other than to set up an external business, none of these strategies were open to Robbie (nor Gordon). Expansion and capacity building were not possible due to land prices and diminishing profits. Nor was there scope for diversifying. Being in an isolated part of the county Robbie's farm is served by a poor road infrastructure. There is no tourism or property speculation because of its

isolated location. Farmers of Robbie's age are independent of mind and action so cooperating with other farmers with whom he is often in dispute is not an option. First and foremost Robbie is a farmer without the life-skills or social capital necessary to diversify into a business other than farming. It is also significant that these strategies all relate to legitimate / lawful behaviours. Leaving farming and doing nothing are not options. Robbie and Gordon took their farming skills and social capitals in a different direction by engaging in illegal forms of pluriactivity. Diagram 1 below illustrates the scale of the illegal pluriactivity practiced by 'the network'.

**Insert figure 1 here**

Elsewhere McElwee and Robson (2005) describe another strategy namely - selective and well managed specialisation and diversification. By following a path of illegality into a niche market Gordon and Robbie are in effect engaging in selective specialisation and diversification. It is well managed because it has to be to evade detection. At an individual level McElwee (2006: 28-35) argues that entrepreneurial characteristics can include ephemeral personal qualities such as charisma and 'an eye for a deal' and intangible issues such as attitudes, culture, perception and values. Robbie and Gordon certainly have an 'eye for a deal'. Nor are they unduly concerned about whether the opportunity is legal or not.

Moreover, Schiebel (2002) argues that successful farmers have a belief in their ability and dominate others around them. Gordon dominates others by his charismatic personality and his aura of roguishness whilst Robbie dominates others around him by his physical presence. It is of note that Alsos *et al* (2003) in studying the phenomenon of the entrepreneurial farmer based their study around the farm household as a unit of analysis. Significantly, the illegal activities of Robbie and Gordon despite being committed for economic gain are subsumed into the familial

budget to maintain their bucolic lifestyle. This is an unusual example of what Gilmore (1936) refers to as rural family capitalism. Robbie does not have a son to pass his farm onto so lives for the here and now. As a consequence extracting monetary value from the environment to pass on to his family is more important to him than stewardship of the land or concerns over husbandry issues. It is a cynical stewardship of capital but is nevertheless stewardship of an entrepreneurial resource.

#### 4.2 Crime and capitalising upon limited opportunities:

Felson and Clark (1998) discuss the opportunity structure of crime as an interaction between the offender and the setting and suggest that for a crime to occur there must be a physical opportunity to carry it out. Because the places in which offenders commit crimes is influenced by their routine activities for example by the places where they live, travel to work, visit friends, or enjoy social or leisure activities then it follows that the places in which they live provide the opportunities for committing crime. This is applicable to the members of 'the network'. Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) argue that an offender's awareness space can be measured in terms of nodes, paths and edges. Thus travelling to and from different nodes, offenders routinely pass a variety of areas which may offer opportunities for crime. Indeed, Brantingham and Brantingham argue that risks of crime are heightened at the edges of an offender's pathways because they will be able to move freely and blend in at these locations, whilst they may not go so unnoticed in the areas beyond the edges, as these will, by definition, be unfamiliar to them. This is particularly true of Gordon who having the appearance of a farmer and contacts amongst various local criminal networks, is in a unique position to commit crimes in a rural setting with minimal risk of getting caught. Marshall and Johnson (2005) highlight that rural areas that share a border with a high crime area may be more susceptible to crime than other similar

rural areas that are more isolated from offenders' routine activities. However, Gordon's peripatetic lifestyle and his access to isolated farming areas increase the vulnerability of those areas to crime. Marshall and Johnson (2005) argue that there has been little research into this issue in the rural context.

To return to the work of Aidis and Van Praag (2007) in relation to illegal entrepreneurship experience (IEE) it is likely that both Gordon and Robbie benefit from such experience as a form of unconventional human capital. Indeed, it is difficult to separate their legal and illegal business operations. To them aspects of legality or 'legal enterprising' are irrelevant. Moreover, the illegal arena provides an opportunity for them to practice entrepreneurship (albeit criminal) in a world of farming which is becoming increasingly regulated and in which opportunities to practice legal entrepreneurship are restricted.

#### 4.3. In search of a rural underclass:

To answer our first research question – is there an indigenous criminal class within the farming community it is necessary to continue the discussion initiated in the previous section. It is clear from the narrative that as farmers, Gordon and Robbie are indeed criminally inclined when an opportunity presents itself in the pragmatic pursuit of money. Gordon as a roving entrepreneur has a total disregard for the law; whilst Robbie is willing to break the laws, rules and regulations and to front up to those in authority. Gordon presents as an archetypal 'likeable rogue'. Conversely Robbie presents as a 'dislikeable rogue'. Both Gordon and Robbie knowingly commit crimes but are not of the criminal fraternity. This is important because there are quicker and easier ways of making fast money open to them if they were prepared to adopt a more criminal persona. Their identities and social capitals are firmly rooted in the farming



community where they hold the privileged position of farmer. This effectively positions them within an 'elite' in the manner envisaged by McKenzie and Green (2008: 139). As such they possess a cultural capital which they share with other farmers. Significantly, McKenzie and Green (2008) appreciate that some unscrupulous members of elite groups within society have the propensity to commit economic crimes. For Engdahl (2008: 158) people who commit economic crime often do so to prevent deterioration in their economic and social standing. Thus maintaining one's precarious position as a farmer may therefore provide the motivation to engage in acts of illegal pluriactivity.

Be this as it may, not all the members of 'the network' can be classified as entrepreneurs. Davie also shows a disregard for the law but his drug addiction has drawn him inexorably into the fringes of nearby urban criminal fraternities. As a rural dweller, his criminality is configured by his rural upbringing and social capitals. The significant driver in Davie's criminality is his addictive personality. Likewise, Stevie knowingly commits crimes for financial and personal gains. Yet, unlike Gordon and Robbie, neither Davie nor Stevie have the entrepreneurial life skills and experience that running a farm brings, instead they are constrained by working class mindsets. Thus even in a rural environment one's social capital influences the social organisation of crime and money making opportunities. This suggests that there is not one indigenous criminal class but a variety of class based criminal positions which one can adopt.

This brings us to consider whether such criminals can be regarded as an entrepreneurial underclass. Clearly, being farmers Gordon and Robbie operate in a different social setting than Stevie and Davie. Davie due to his addictions can truly be assigned to the underclass but conversely Stevie cannot because he still has control

over his destiny. For him crime is a flirtation. Notwithstanding this Davie and Stevie are examples of a rural underclass as envisaged by Berg and Delisi (2005). It is only within the unifying label of farmer and in particular as the sub set of 'bad' farmer that Gordon and Robbie can be regarded as belonging to an underclass. However, all can be assigned the status of a rural underclass. Gordon, Robbie, Stevie and Davie are all making use of their social and cultural capitals to varying degrees but only Gordon and Robbie can be regarded as entrepreneurs. Although all the subjects create their own chances and extract value from their rural environment as envisaged by Anderson (1995) - only Gordon and Robbie are entrepreneurs! Clearly, there must be more to entrepreneurship than creating and extracting value from an environment?

## **5.0. Observations, implications, limitations and conclusions in relation to confronting social constructions of rural criminality**

This article widens the research picture by presenting and examining pluriactivity and illegal income-generating strategies such as sheep rustling, cattle theft, the theft of trailers and farm equipment, the theft of gates, the illicit trade in veterinary products, and diesel. If such items are capable of being stolen or acquired illegally and then traded then they present money making opportunities. In doing so, this article not only challenges but confronts the accepted stereotype and constructions of rural criminality. The 'network' also trade in the breeding and sale of wild animals and pedigree dogs. Whilst their primary motivation in this appears to make a profit there are other elements at play. In this section we also consider how this study informs future research. One of the most important contributions it makes is by drawing together studies from entrepreneurship and criminology which may otherwise have

remained within their discipline. The paper also contributes to extant knowledge because it demonstrates that rural crime is not merely committed by the urban under classes. Conversely, there is a rural underclass and petty bourgeoisie capable of exploiting their environment for financial gain. Thus, although the author initially designated these individuals as rogues some of them possess an entrepreneurial flair. In conducting their legal business activities and illegal criminal activity often simultaneously it can be argued that they exhibit obvious entrepreneurial proclivity. In engaging in acts of criminal-entrepreneurship *per se* they thus straddle the disparate worlds of farming and crime as we know it. Moreover, in considering the farmer as a ‘Criminal Entrepreneur’ this paper adds to existing taxonomies of farming stereotypes such as the ‘Gentleman Farmer’ (Bryer, 2005; Bouden, 2003) and the ‘Businessman Farmer’ (Rome, 1982; Bryer, 2005).

Moreover, the case story presented in this article is an example of an alternative cultural script relating to rural masculine identities (Enticott and Vanclay, 2011). Enticott and Vanclay (2011) define a script as a culturally shared expression, story or common line of argument, or an expected unfolding of events, that is deemed to be appropriate or expected in a particular socially defined context, and that provides a rationale or justification for a particular issue or course of action. In confronting and thus challenging the socially expected idyllic stereotype of the farmer as a rural hero this research enhances our understandings of the social life of farmers and other rural residents.

Marshall and Johnson (2005: 50) made a call for case studies to be conducted in a variety of areas with different demographic characteristics to explore who is committing crime in rural areas – the locals or aliens from urban centres. This paper makes a modest contribution in terms of entrepreneurship, criminology and rural

studies. Moreover, Marshall and Johnson (2005: 50) argue that if in a particular rural area the majority of crimes were committed by local prolific offenders, then this would lead to a change in how offences can be detected as well as influencing how crime prevention is administered. Similarly, Engdahl (2008: 166) made a call for studies which show how people commit economic crime when they are well integrated into society and well adjusted to life in their community.

There are obvious limitations to this research in that the methodologies used can only take the story so far. In particular, we were interested in the question of why there so little interest in criminal farmers in the literature and also with the question of why this is changing now? This may well be because of the increase in studies challenging the social construction of rural criminality and gendered identities. In particular, interest in rural masculinities is increasing and the rural criminal-entrepreneurs discussed here are yet another example of a gendered rural identity. It may well be that rural crime, like urban crime has changed because of the changing entrepreneurial nature of crime in general. However, it is just as likely that the discursive absence of the rogue-farmer from the literature more likely relates to a lack of research access into a closed social world. In recent years the press have been more critical in their coverage of rural events including rural crime. The unobtrusive research methodology employed means that we are unable to answer the questions of why farmers become engaged in illegal activities; or address what is it about criminality in rural areas that makes it 'rural' and different from 'urban criminality'? We believe there is indeed a difference that goes beyond the difference in location but that is an issue for further research.

This article makes a conceptual and empirical to the field of rural sociology by discussing the issues of deviancy and rural criminality which confronts and challenges

the clean and proper image of the rural idyll and the stereotype of the good-farmer. In particular, it addresses their discursive absence in the literatures of crime, entrepreneurship and rural studies. It is anticipated that this article will stimulate discussion into the subjects covered and lead to further funded research into the sociology of rural crime and enterprise in what is a rapidly changing rural environment. The article could also have practical applications in respect of knowledge transfer because rural criminality and in particular rural criminal-entrepreneurship is seldom considered by academics, policy makers, practitioners/rural entrepreneurs *per se*. This paper also attempts to bring together theory and practice in the field of rural enterprise and management by encouraging research between academics and practitioners. This is important because illegal enterprises such as dog-fighting, badger baiting and so forth generate illegal income for those who engage in such activities (Smith, 2001). In the final analysis it is up to the reader to decide whether Robbie and Gordon are farmers, rogue-entrepreneurs or thieves!

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