

## EARLY WARNING NOTIFICATION

### Thefts of agricultural machinery

#### What is happening?

Agricultural machinery – mainly tractors as well as other heavy farming equipment – are targeted for theft by criminals in various countries. This is not a new phenomenon. However, the numbers of thefts and affected countries have been increasing. This development may be linked to the economic crisis

Two distinct *modi operandi* have been identified:

1. New high-value machines are stolen from dealerships.

In France alone, more than 40 tractors have been stolen from dealers throughout the country over the past year. The value of the stolen machinery adds up to more than EUR 3 million. The crime groups involved are well organised, feature a clear division of tasks and have an international dimension. Stolen tractors are loaded onto lorries and transported to other countries. Some of the stolen tractors were discovered in Germany, Hungary and Romania. Tractors stolen in other countries such as the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Austria were recovered in Hungary. Other countries may have seen similar thefts.



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2. Used machines are stolen from farmers.

Since July 2012, 20 tractors have been stolen from farmers in the Austrian district of Burgenland, close to the Hungarian border. The total loss is estimated at more than EUR 1 million. Some of the stolen tractors were discovered hidden in a nearby forest.



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Similar thefts have received media attention in other countries. At least 9 agricultural vehicles were stolen in Zeeland (NL) over the course of three weeks (end of September to beginning October 2013). Various thefts also occurred throughout the Belgian countryside. Some machines were stolen from fields, others from sheds close to the farm.

### When and how do they operate?

The thieves are mainly active at night time, but some thefts occurred in broad daylight too. The lack of security measures surrounding this type of machinery is a facilitating factor in both types of thefts. Tractors and other agricultural machinery are often left on fields or in easily accessible sheds. The premises of companies selling this type of equipment are often poorly secured. They are frequently situated in isolated industrial areas close to main roads and represent an attractive target for well-organised thieves. Furthermore, the keys to these vehicles are often interchangeable. One key can be used on different machines of the same or in some cases even different brands. The absence of license plates or other identification marks on most of the machinery is another vulnerability. Initiatives to raise awareness and enhance preventative measures have not had the desired effect of noticeably reducing the number of thefts.