# COUNTRYSIDE UNITES AGAINST RURAL CRIME

## Rural Crime Report 2023




**LATEST TRENDS**
How thieves are cashing in on high demand and low supply

**LATEST FIGURES**
In-depth analysis of crime statistics from across the countryside

**LATEST INSIGHTS**
Views from the key people tackling crime in our rural communities

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**£400,000**
invested by NFU Mutual to tackle rural crime in 2022

**22.1%**
increase in the cost of rural crime in 2022

**80%**
say rural crime is disrupting farming activities*

*Survey of 175 NFU Mutual Agents

Jim McLaren – NFU Mutual Chairman

# WORKING TOGETHER TO STEM RISING TIDE OF COUNTRYSIDE CRIME

This year's rural crime figures make depressing reading but sadly will not come as a surprise to most farmers. Theft continues to blight our agricultural industry and many farmers have experienced the loss of farm machinery, vehicles, fuel or GPS units.

Previous periods of economic disruption have brought a rise in theft and last year was no different. While crime previously went down in 2020 and 2021 over the pandemic, this will provide little comfort to farmers who are waking up to find an empty space in the barn where their quad should be.

Rural thieves are no longer opportunists from the nearest town. Today, crime is controlled by organised and often international gangs, and world events and new illicit markets have an impact on the demand for stolen kit. As well as criminals trespassing on farms to scope out properties, NFU Mutual has also received reports of thieves using drones and other technology to identify targets.

The costly issue of rural crime impacts lives and livelihoods as it puts additional pressure on farming families who may feel vulnerable knowing that homes and workplaces are being watched.

That's why we are providing financial support and expertise to help establish a new rural crime police unit. Faced with increasingly sophisticated and determined criminals operating in our countryside, the unit will co-ordinate efforts against rural crime nationally and help share best practice to provide a platform to fight back.

Farmers are helping themselves in a number of ways too. For instance, I'm delighted that the pioneering Cumbria YFC's security training scheme is now being rolled out nationally with our support so that young farmers can help their peers identify the risks and solutions when it comes to protecting their property.

Our close links to farming mean we understand the severe stress and disruption that rural crime is causing our members. We're working closely with police forces across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and continue to provide funding for national and local rural security initiatives to make it harder for criminals to operate in the countryside.



# Fighting rural crime




> Since NFU Mutual funded and helped set up a dedicated agricultural vehicle theft unit in 2010, it has shared intelligence, delivered training, and worked with police forces across the country and overseas to seize millions of pounds of stolen machinery. This team is now part of the new National Rural Crime Unit, which will strengthen work at a national level so that specialist police resources can be targeted where they are needed most to protect farmers and the wider rural community.
>
> **Bob Henderson**
> NFU Mutual

# FIGHTING RURAL CRIME

As a mutual with members at its heart, our work goes much further than simply paying claims.

Since 2010, we have invested in a dedicated police unit at NaVCIS, specialising in agricultural vehicle crime, to work with police forces on joint operations to disrupt organised gangs.

We enhance their effectiveness through a dedicated team at NFU Mutual who share claims intelligence and work to identify areas at risk, patterns and assist recoveries. As a result of this joint work, the NaVCIS police unit seized £2.3m worth of stolen vehicles and machinery in 2022. Hundreds of officers from forces across Great Britain and Northern Ireland were also trained in theft awareness and identification methods last year.

In Spring 2023, the unit became the National Construction and Agri Theft Team under the new National Rural Crime Unit (NRCU). Co-ordinating rural crime reporting centrally for the first time, the NRCU will help police across the country tackle organised theft regionally and nationally, as well as sharing best practice such as Rural Watch, Partnerships Against Rural Crime and Rural Crime Volunteers.

We also continue to support SPARC – the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime – and are members of the Rural Crime Partnership in Northern Ireland.

Along with the police and NFU partners, NFU Mutual has been a key contributor in helping shape new legislation to protect farmers through the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Bill. The Bill aims to prevent both the theft and re-sale of agricultural equipment and we are also working with manufacturers to out-design crime, so that farmers can keep one step ahead of the thieves.

The future generations of farmers are key to changing security habits among the community. We have supported a new intergenerational project to train young farmers in crime prevention so they can advise other farmers and the wider rural community on practical ways to make farms secure against the threats of today's determined criminals. The initiative started in Cumbria and is now offered across the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs.



# Latest trends and new illicit markets



> These raids are causing huge disruption to farming and are causing widespread anxiety. It sends a chill to your heart to see CCTV images of people boldly entering your yard at night and smashing down steel doors.

**Glenn Buckingham**
Farmer




Hannah Binns – Rural Affairs Specialist

# LATEST TRENDS AND NEW ILLICIT MARKETS

Farmers and the rural community came under significant pressure last year as the cost of rural crime shot up 22.1% to an estimated £49.5m. Criminals scoured farmyards and fields across the UK looking to take advantage of high inflation and the ready resale markets domestically and internationally. A survey of NFU Mutual Agents found 86% think thieves are cashing in on the limited supply of vehicles and rising prices. World events have triggered new illicit markets, creating more demand for stolen machinery. These thefts are hitting the rural community harder as it continues to battle with the cost-of-living crisis.

After two years of NFU Mutual seeing a fall, it is concerning to now see rural crime reach pre-pandemic levels despite farmers' best efforts to protect themselves. Shockingly, 70% of NFU Mutual Agents surveyed knew farmers who had been repeat victims of rural crime, with many feeling targeted and often vulnerable in what is not just their workplace but also their family home.

## Agricultural vehicles and GPS theft

The total cost of agricultural vehicle claims soared by 29% to £11.7m in 2022 as organised criminal gangs cashed in on the rising cost and limited supply of vehicles and machinery.

The cost of GPS theft increased by 15% to £1.8m in 2022, with thieves returning with a vengeance to steal these highly valuable and easily portable kits. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are vital to modern farming and without the sophisticated equipment to guide tractors and combines, farmers can face severe delays and disruptions to important harvesting and cultivating work, with long waits for replacement kit.

Alarmingly, early claim figures indicate the cost of GPS theft more than doubled in the first four months in 2023 as criminals travelled the length and breadth of the UK to attack even more farms.



# LATEST TRENDS AND NEW ILLICIT MARKETS

## Quad and ATV theft

Prized for their value and portability, quad bikes and ATVs were top targets for rural thieves. In 2022, quad and ATV theft reported to NFU Mutual cost £3m, a 34% rise on the previous year.

These vital vehicles enable farmers to efficiently complete work out in the fields. Theft can therefore be highly disruptive to the day-to-day operation of the farm until a replacement can be sourced. But continuing supply chain issues are adding additional pressure on farmers.

## Trailer theft

Soaring second-hand markets and demand sent the cost of trailer thefts up 66% in 2022, totalling £2.9m. With some being used for only a few weeks each year, and others on standby for regular transportation of livestock, trailers can be vulnerable to thieves who are stealing them in high numbers from fields and farmyards. Farmers are increasingly using forensic marking and tracking because trailers can be difficult to trace and easy for thieves to sell without documentation.

## Land Rover Defender theft

Although the cost of Land Rover Defender theft decreased slightly in 2022 to £2.4m, these icons of British heritage remain high on rural thieves' shopping lists. Though not uncommon for entire vehicles to be stolen, Land Rover Defenders are often targeted for their valuable parts, with reports of vehicles being stripped down overnight.

## Fuel theft

Theft of fuel from both farms and rural homes doubled in 2022 as high inflation turned organised and opportunist thieves towards the liquid gold sitting in fuel tanks across the country. With domestic oil and diesel hitting high prices last year, fuel theft also rocketed in 2022. Fuel theft can be highly disruptive, halting vital farm work or depriving a rural family of heat and hot water during the coldest times of the year.

## Livestock theft

Livestock theft is a millennia-old crime and in 2022 farmers in the UK continued to find themselves and their animals targeted by thieves. At an estimated £2.7m (a rise of 8.7%), livestock theft remains one of the costliest crimes to farming. With claims reported to NFU Mutual regularly involving over 50 sheep taken in a single raid, livestock theft can have a devastating impact on breeding lines as well as being a huge worry for farmers about the welfare of the stolen stock.

## Dog attacks on livestock

UK farm animals worth an estimated £1.8m were killed or injured by dogs in 2022. Shockingly, the cost of dog attacks on livestock increased more than 50% between 2019 and 2022 as puppies purchased over the pandemic came of age.

As well as receiving reports of out-of-control dogs attacking farm animals and leaving them to suffer and die from unbearable injuries, NFU Mutual has heard from farmers whose livestock have drowned, suffocated, fallen off cliffs or miscarried as a result of being chased by dogs. Despite these reports, NFU Mutual's latest survey of over 1,100 dog owners found almost half (46%) believed their dog was not capable of injuring or killing livestock and 39% admitted their pets do not always come back when called.



# Proactive measures to protect farms



> To protect our property, we've adopted a zero-tolerance approach – no machinery, kit, tools or equipment are left out. Everything's now brought back to the farm and locked up securely – even though it adds a lot of time to routine jobs.
>
> **Paul Day**
> Farmer

# PROACTIVE MEASURES TO PROTECT FARMS

Fighting rural crime is a collaborative effort and farmers play a key role in this by taking a proactive approach to security and implementing measures on-farm to fortify their businesses.

No two farms or rural businesses are the same and there is no silver bullet solution, but there are some tried and tested measures proven to deter determined rural thieves.

**Watch our videos to get insight on how you can protect your interests**

## Here, NFU Mutual shares its top tips for securing farm businesses:



### PHYSICAL

- Close and lock gates
- Remove keys from vehicles and store them in a safe, secure place
- Park farm machinery and vehicles out of sight, preferably in a locked building
- Lock away high-value items like GPS units
- Mark livestock and property
- Note down serial and chassis numbers of items you own
- Animals are still effective early warning systems, with noise scaring criminals off



### TECHNICAL

- Install CCTV, security lighting and alarms
- CESAR mark, etch or mark farm name and postcode onto kit
- Add tracking devices and immobilisers onto vehicles
- PIN protect GPS units and apply manufacturer stickers
- Use mechanical immobilisers such as steering wheel or pedal locks on vehicles
- Keep fuel tanks in secure compounds and consider using locks and sensors



### SOCIAL

- Report all crimes and suspicious activity to the police
- Join and participate in groups like Farm Watch and Rural Watch schemes
- Use local WhatsApp groups for immediate updates on suspicious sightings
- Use the Crimestoppers number to report rural crime anonymously

**Crimestoppers can be contacted on: 0800 555 111**

# Counting the cost of crime



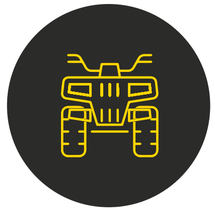
# COUNTING THE COST OF CRIME

Based on NFU Mutual claim statistics, we estimate that rural theft cost the UK £49.5m in 2022, up 22.1% on the previous year.

While Scotland saw a decrease, most areas of the UK saw a rise in rural crime costs as thieves returned to the countryside and ramped up their activity after the pandemic years.



**AV THEFT COST £11.7M***
29% increase on 2021



**QUAD THEFT COST £3M***
34% increase on 2021



**GPS THEFT COST £1.8M***
15% increase on 2021



**TRAILER THEFT COST £2.9M***
66% increase on 2021



**LAND ROVER THEFT COST £2.4M***
7% decrease on 2021

*Claims costs to NFU Mutual

| Region or County | Cost in 2022 | Cost in 2021 | % Change from 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **East** | £6.6m | £5.1m | 28.5% |
| **Midlands** | £11m | £8.4m | 30.1% |
| **North East** | £8.3m | £6.7m | 23.7% |
| **North West** | £3.2m | £2.8m | 11.8% |
| **Northern Ireland** | £2.5m | £1.7m | 50.7% |
| **Scotland** | £1.4m | £2.6m | -48.3% |
| **South East** | £9.3m | £7.5m | 24.1% |
| **South West** | £5m | £4.3m | 16.6% |
| **Wales** | £2.3m | £1.3m | 72.8% |
| **Total** | **£49.5m** | **£40.5m** | **22.1%** |

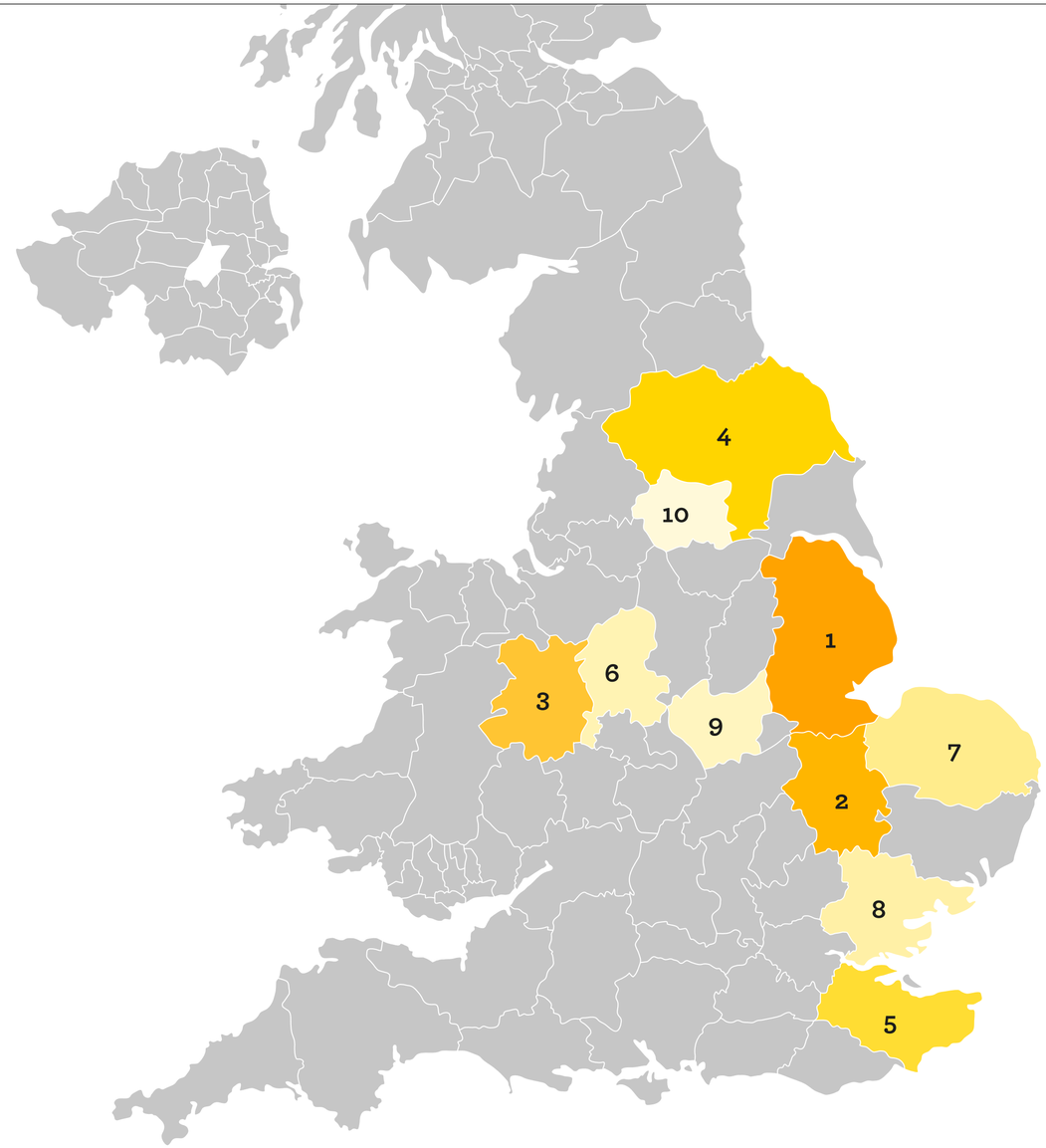
Estimates based on NFU Mutual claims statistics, costs rounded to the nearest £100,000. Percentage changes are based on exact figures.

# THE COST OF RURAL THEFT AROUND THE UK

## The 10 worst affected counties by cost in 2022

| Rank and County | 2021 | 2022 | % change from 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Lincolnshire | £2,406,760 | **£2,538,444** | 5.5% |
| 2. Cambridgeshire | £936,420 | **£2,094,622** | 123.7% |
| 3. Shropshire | £996,283 | **£2,019,793** | 102.7% |
| 4. North Yorkshire | £920,428 | **£1,910,030** | 107.5% |
| 5. Kent | £1,382,426 | **£1,895,052** | 37.1% |
| 6. Staffordshire | £955,735 | **£1,692,822** | 77.1% |
| 7. Norfolk | £990,288 | **£1,505,335** | 52% |
| 8. Essex | £1,651,877 | **£1,495,104** | -9.5% |
| 9. Leicestershire | £1,235,802 | **£1,472,387** | 19.1% |
| 10. West Yorkshire | £934,529 | **£1,443,191** | 54.4% |

Estimates based on NFU Mutual claim statistics. Percentage changes are based on exact figures.



# Views from the field



# VIEWS FROM THE FIELD




**Superintendent Andrew Huddleston**

Head of National Rural Crime Unit

The National Rural Crime Unit has been set up to help forces tackle rural crime priorities through the provision of specialist operational support.

It also takes the lead on national issues including improved co-ordination and partnership working as well as legislative change such as modern security as standard on farm machinery.

In the first four months of 2023, the team identified over £1.5m of stolen equipment.

A national co-ordinator is in place to establish partnerships against rural crime in all regions building on best practice and sharing what works, such as the Rural Watch scheme and ANPR.

The team is primarily funded by NFU Mutual and its success is now attracting wider financial support. This means we will have dedicated national specialists for rural fly tipping and hopefully livestock theft in the near future.



**David Exwood**

NFU Vice President

The NFU has worked with NFU Mutual for several years to bring police, manufacturers and other interested parties together to find ways of tackling rural crime. In summer 2022, we worked with Greg Smith MP on his Equipment Theft (Prevention) Bill and we are grateful to Greg and the Home Office for their open approach to engaging with the farming industry on this important piece of legislation.

This Bill has the potential to give the Secretary of State the power to make regulations that deter the theft and resale of vehicles as well as aid police in investigating and recovering stolen machinery and equipment such as GPS. It would also help ensure immobilisers and security markers are included on ATVs at point of sale.

With the Bill receiving Royal Assent we welcome the fact that government and the police now have wider powers to tackle increasing incidents of equipment theft on-farm.



**Rhianna Montgomery**

NFU Scotland Rural Business Policy Adviser

Spring 2023 has seen a constant stream of reports of cattle and sheep being attacked by dogs. We must continue to focus on ensuring that all dog owners are made aware that Scotland now has robust legislation and penalties in place dealing with livestock attacks. Fines of up to £40,000 and 12-months' imprisonment in Scotland for such offences, and any successful prosecutions under the new legislation must be more widely publicised to act as a deterrent against irresponsible dog ownership.

Alongside livestock attacks by dogs, any incidents of rustling will inflict significant suffering on farmers and crofters who have lost stock. Vigilance is key. In any case of rustling, trailers and lorries will be involved and we continue to encourage anyone who notices a strange vehicle in an unusual place to report the registration number and any details to 101 and allow Police Scotland to take the matter further.

# VIEWS FROM THE FIELD



## Rob Taylor QPM

Wales Rural and Wildlife Police Coordinator

The newly released Welsh Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy jigsaws with the national rural strategy but additionally gives us focus to what really affects Wales and our rural and farming communities.

We are now seeing proactive operations to tackle illegal off-roading and farm crime and we have a bespoke “UK first” training course in place, that has witnessed over 60 police officers experiencing farming practices first-hand in the classroom and on a working farm.

We are encouraged by the implementation of the National Rural Crime Unit and we look forward to an even closer working relationship with them to assist in tackling all forms of rural crime.




## Sarah Morrell

Ulster Farmers Union Policy Officer

Reducing incidences of rural crime and encouraging farmers to implement and maintain farm security is an ongoing area of work for the UFU. However, to be successful in combating rural crime across Northern Ireland, it’s vital all stakeholders work together.

In Autumn 2022, the UFU rolled out on farm training for PSNI officers for the first time, which saw approximately 230 neighbourhood, district support and crime prevention officers receive training on a farm. Farmers also have a responsibility to rural crime and can play a part in reducing incidents by taking proactive measures to protect their farm. UFU are pleased to work with the Rural Crime Partnership and feature rural crime as an ongoing topic for the Young Farmers Clubs’ of Ulster public speaking competition.




## Stephanie Berkeley

Farm Safety Manager

Rural crime can have devastating effects on farmers and their families – financial, psychological and social. But too often, the impact of rural crime on the physical and mental well-being of the farmer can be overlooked. The UK’s farming industry is struggling with spiralling costs and levels of mental well-being in farming have been deteriorating over the past few years. This can have a direct impact on safety behaviours in an industry that already has the poorest safety record in the UK.

Victimisation, being repeatedly targeted by criminals, a reluctance to report the crime and the costs borne by farmers already under pressure from the aftermath of Brexit, a global pandemic, supply chain shortages and spiralling costs mean that rural crime often cuts deeper than financial loss. This is not just a workplace that has been targeted, this is someone’s home and the high levels of anxiety and disruption can have a significant impact on psychological well-being and make victims feel vulnerable and alone.

# THE UK'S LEADING RURAL INSURER

NFU Mutual offers a wide range of products, including general insurance, life, pensions, and investments. These products and services are delivered through our network of NFU Mutual Agent offices, as well as through our direct sales and service centres.

With 295 local businesses located in rural towns and villages throughout the UK, NFU Mutual has become part of the fabric of rural life and remains committed to serving the needs of our members nationwide.

NFU Mutual is proud to deliver more than simply insurance. Making farming safer, supporting rural initiatives across the UK and helping to look after the environment are just some of the ways we support our communities.

**Join in the conversation using #ruralcrimereport**

**Report rural crime**

In an emergency always **call 999**, otherwise **call 101**.

**Want to remain 100% anonymous?**

Contact the independent charity Crimestoppers online at **crimestoppers-uk.org** or by calling **0800 555 111**

We would encourage anyone who is concerned about how rural crime is impacting the physical or mental well-being of someone they know, to reach out and let them know that help is available and they are not alone.

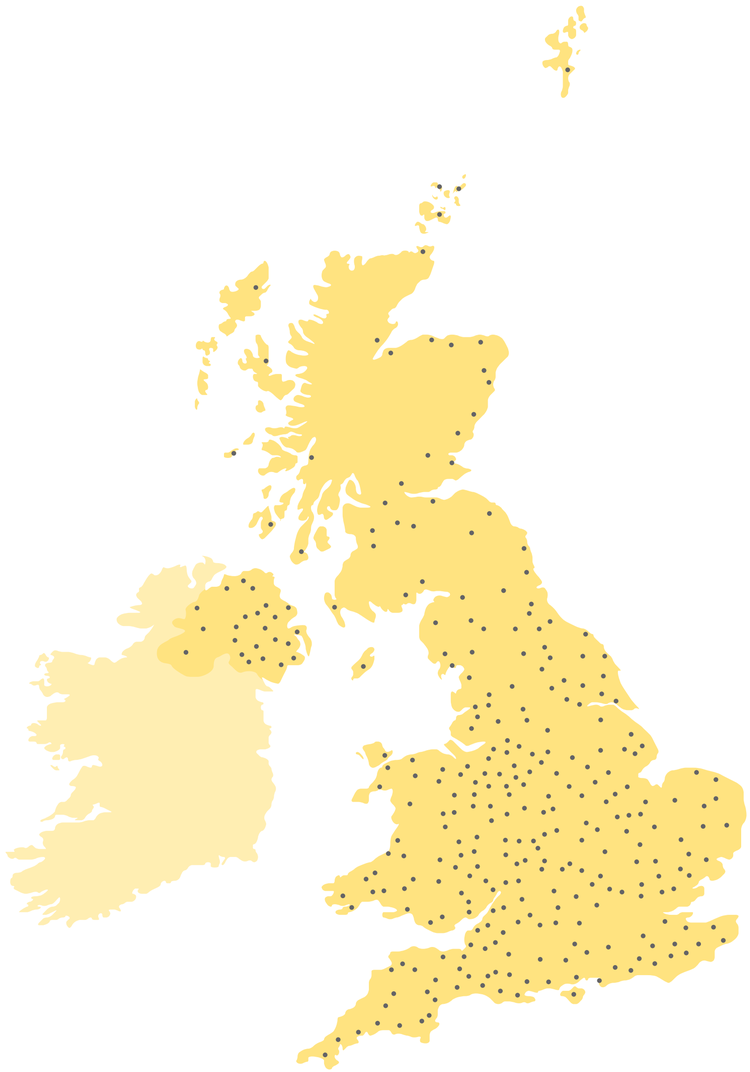
*The Little Book of Minding Your Head* contains more information on how to help as well as contact details for the UK's rural support groups and farming charities and is available at **www.yellowwellies.org**

**For more information on the farming unions, visit:**

NFU in England and Wales
**nfuonline.com**

NFU Scotland
**nfus.org.uk**

Ulster Farmers Union
**ufuni.org**



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