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Farm family troubled by loss of calf

In Southampton, fear is that rustlers could strike again

By CATHERINE BAUM
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Thursday, March 5, 2009

SOUTHAMPTON - Every morning 13-year-old Matthew Fletcher helps out on his family's dairy farm and feeds its 20 newborn calves. On Saturday, this usually happy chore was marred by his discovery that the smallest calf was missing.

Fletcher knew something was up when he saw the 150-pound Jersey calf's pen open. Now, the family expects the 5-month-old calf that once ate and slept there will never return.

"I know the calf is long gone," said Robert Fletcher, Matthew's father and owner of Fletcher Farm.

Robert Fletcher notified the Southampton Police Department, which reported the calf was stolen late Friday night or early Saturday morning.

"I think my biggest thing right now is to make sure it doesn't happen again," he said. "I don't think it's going to stop until I catch this person."

The Fletchers are considering new fencing, a security alarm and a video camera to tighten security at the wide-open farm.

"It means more money out of our pocket," Robert Fletcher said. "I do expect them to come back; I just don't know when."

Meanwhile, Matthew Fletcher is more cautious than ever.


"Every day he goes up to take a head count to make sure another one hasn't been taken," said Cheryl Fletcher, Matthew's mother.

The Fletchers believe two people stole the calf, valued at approximately \$500, as there were two distinct sets of footprints in the mud Saturday. Hoof prints were only seen at the end of the driveway, which is between the barn and greenhouse. The calves are kept in the greenhouse, about 60 feet away from the road.

"They took the smallest one because she was the easiest to grab," Cheryl Fletcher said. "They probably carried the calf to the end of the driveway and set the animal down to pop the trunk or something. It certainly happened in a very short time."


Police Chief David Silvernail said the case is closed because the Fletcher family declined to press ahead, feeling there is no way to prove the cow was stolen, given that it has probably been eaten.

The Fletchers said earlier on Tuesday that the thieves likely knew the building and farm work schedule.



GORDON DANIELS

Robert Fletcher, of Fletcher Farm on Gunn Road in Southampton, feeds grain to one of his 20 calves. Over the weekend, Fletcher says, somebody entered his greenhouse where the calves are penned and stole a 150-pound calf.




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"It was definitely someone who knew what was in the building," Cheryl Fletcher said.

Robert Fletcher said he believes he knows who stole the calf, but pressing charges "would make the situation worse."

"I'm sure if I went to court most people would laugh it off," he said. "My guess is he would get a slap on the wrist and I think there'd be payback for me. If I take him to court, who's to say he's not going to come back with a torch of gas and burn my farm. There's no easy answer."

The farm, located off Route 10 and Gunn Road, comprises 100 acres and a herd of 100 cows. The 19 calves, many of which are registered Holstein and Jersey calves, are being raised for 4-H projects and eventually to join the milking herd.

"She was a registered animal with a certain set of genetics - it's like having a piece of paper that says she's more valuable than a mongrel brand," Cheryl Fletcher said.

The farm is accessible to the public. Southampton, Holyoke, Easthampton and Northampton schoolchildren frequent the farm for field trips.

"For a lot of these kids, it is their first and only exposure to a farm," Cheryl Fletcher said. "Not being able to do that - to not be so visible - is something we just don't want to do."

The family looks to the community for support in keeping the farm secure.

"Our hope is that maybe people will look and help be another set of eyes, and if there's anything strange going on they will call," Fletcher said. "I think people will help."

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Thu, 03/05/2009 - 10:33 — [Lola008](#)

Fletcher Farm

I pass by here everyday at least twice. I will be sure to take a closer look for suspicious activity. What is the matter with people? This family does so much to be viable as a farm. My kids have bought pumpkins, christmas trees, and had field trips here. Nice people trying to make a living getting jacked by a jerk who needs more than a slap on the wrist.

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Thu, 03/05/2009 - 10:28 — [kaunabob](#)

Southampton

There's very little crime in Southampton besides speeding tickets and false alarms. I think the Southampton police should take this seriously and follow up on this. They used to spend many hours parked on route 10 when Buckwheats was open maybe they could park a little further downn the road now. It's a shame that these people have to be concerned about these losers coming back or retribution. I hope they get caught and are punished appropriately.

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Ever hear Fred Eaglesmith sing ?

"Time to get a gun, thats what I been thinkin"

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