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Tim Nelson · November 19, 2019 12:11 PM

'Booby traps' found in Minnesota cornfield raise vandalism worries

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Updated: 1:15 p.m.

At least one Minnesota farm family harvesting corn this fall found what authorities are describing as “booby traps” in their fields, possibly aimed at damaging farm equipment.

Meeker County Sheriff Brian Cruze says a farmer near Cedar Mills on Monday reported minor damage to a combine from chain drawn into the machine during harvesting.

He said any speculation on the motive was premature, and that the chain may have been in the corn for weeks or months.

“They initially picked up a chain in the combine, but they were kind of close to the road, and from what he described it, when you’re close to the road you pick up stuff that’s been thrown off of the road.

“So they really didn’t think a whole lot about it. But then they got into the corn, quite a ways into the corn, and it happened again,” Cruze said.

The second incident involved what appeared to be a 6-foot piece of steel rebar pounded into the ground near a cornstalk where it was hard to see, said Mindy Johnson, whose family farms about 2,000 acres of corn and soybeans.

That’s what prompted a call to authorities, she said. Her family’s combine, like most others, is fitted with a “slip clutch” that prevents damage from such objects, but she said it’s still concerning and still could have hurt someone under the right circumstances.

“Obviously, there was some intent there to do some damage,” the sheriff said.

Johnson posted a photo of chain wrapped around a corn stalk on Facebook, and said she’s been hearing and getting similar photos from other farmers in Minnesota and elsewhere.

“A lot of people just don’t think about reporting it. I have just been surprised to hear all of the other stories that people are sharing,” she said. “We just need to come together as a farming community on this and be watching out for each other.”

"There is no known (similar) reports that we know of at this point, in Minnesota," Cruze said. "So we are asking the public for their assistance. If there's another incident like this about it, we want to know about it. Or if anybody knows anything about this we want to know about it."

A spokesperson for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture said they hadn't heard of any similar incidents there.

A similar spate of vandalism was reported in Ontario near Ottawa in 2017.

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