

Homemade Anti-theft Deterrent for Tractors

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Crime, unfortunately, is a fact of life in every society. Whether you live in a big city or in a rural area, crime seems to be present everywhere to some degree. This holds particularly true for those in the agriculture industry, our farmers and ranchers. The National Equipment Register (NER) and National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) estimate that the annual cost of equipment theft varies from \$300 million to \$1 billion. These statistics do not include the cost of business interruption, wasted labor time, equipment replacement, etc. The 2014 Theft Report published by the NER and NICB places California as number six in the top ten states for equipment theft; as little as 20% of the stolen equipment is recovered.

We recently had an incident in which someone broke into our county research farm and stole a Landini tractor and a utility trailer. The equipment yard where the tractor was stored is fenced and securely locked. However, as we all know that's not much of a deterrent for a thief that wants to take your things. Any obstacle can be overcome with enough time and the right tools. The stolen tractor was eventually located down the road where it ran out of diesel. For good measure, they forcibly pried the battery out of the tractor before they high tailed it out of there. The trailer, however, has not been recovered. Since the theft, we have added new security cameras and motion detector lights to help repel any other would be thieves. These again are just more deterrents and not a guarantee that someone will break in again to steal more equipment.

Our small research farm is not supported by the University but is entirely operated by our office through grants and donations we receive. Whether it's a tractor, screwdriver, irrigation water, or seed, we have to come up with grant money to pay for operating the farm. So any theft we experience is a difficult blow to our program. Anything we can do to prevent theft is a priority to keep running our small research farm.

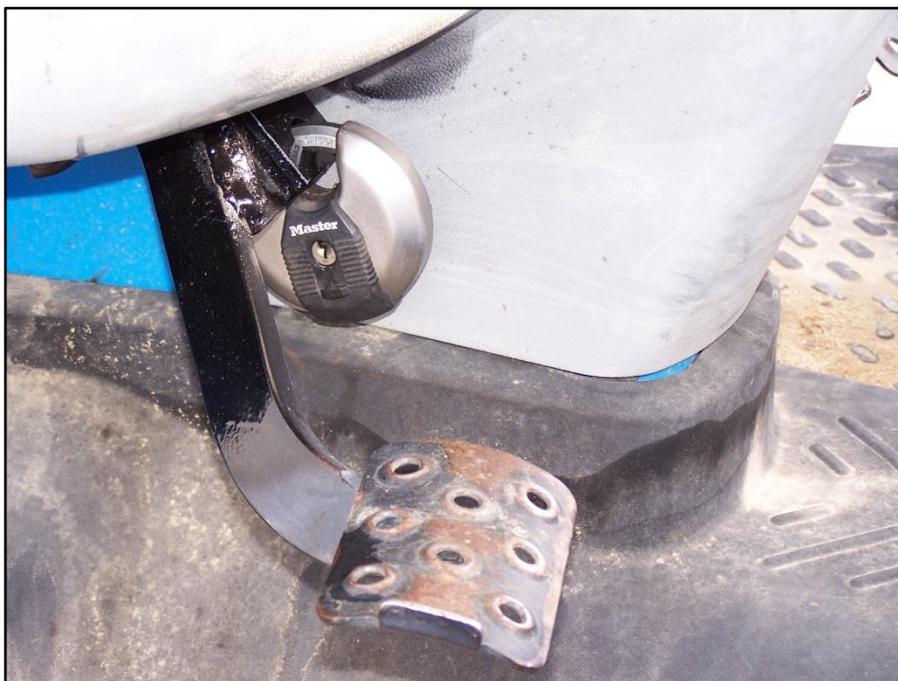
Something that we devised that we think could benefit others is a simple locking device for tractors. It can be easily and inexpensively made and it adds an extra layer of theft protection to a tractor. A tab with a hole was welded onto the clutch pedal and a hole was drilled into the tractor frame. Then a padlock is used to lock the clutch pedal so it cannot be engaged. Locking the clutch prevents the tractor from being started and/or being engaged into gear. For some tractors a tab will need to be welded to the clutch pedal and another onto the frame to be able to lock the clutch. The lock needs to be a shrouded type of lock so that a bolt cutter cannot be used to simply cut it. Figures 1. and 2. show how it was applied to two of our tractors. Will it stop a professional thief that comes into an equipment yard with all the right tools? Most likely not. But it will help to slow them down and perhaps increase the chance of them being caught in the act or persuade them to find an easier target of opportunity. It should greatly deter the more common run of the mill drug addict that is looking for something quick and easy to steal.

This simple, and hopefully effective, device can be easily made and applied to many tractors. Perhaps this is something that others can use to help prevent the theft or vandalism of a tractor. We want to thank Rick Ramirez out of the UCCE-Kern office for taking our idea and modifying it and building something easy and practical to use.

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



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