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Ministry of National Security

The Israel Police's Handling of Agricultural Crime – Follow-up Audit



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Background

Agricultural crime harms various branches of agriculture through the theft of animals or agricultural products, theft of agricultural equipment, harming animals, trespassing and taking over grazing lands, arson, and damaging agricultural equipment, infrastructure, and fields. The Penal Law, 1977 addresses several offenses of agricultural crime. In 2008, the Israel Police (the Police) placed responsibility on the Israel Border Police (Border Police) over the handling of agricultural crime in rural areas. This includes assisting the Police units in fighting crime in rural areas while emphasizing combating agricultural crimes. In May 2017, the State Comptroller's Office published an audit report on "The Israel Police's Handling of Agricultural Crime"¹ (the previous audit). The present audit follows-up the rectifications of the deficiencies found in the previous audit (the follow-up audit).

1 State Comptroller, **Annual Report 67B** (2017), "The Israel Police's Handling of Agricultural Crime", pp. 1297–1360. The previous audit examined, among other things, the rectification of the deficiencies found in the report that preceded it: **Annual Report 62** (2012), "Issues in the Crime and Routine Security in the Rural Sector", pp. 1701–1729.



Key Figures

977

agricultural crime offenses for which investigation files were opened in 2021

18%

average rate of indictments in 2017–2021 out of all investigation files opened for agricultural crime (827 out of 4,602)

70%

the closure rate of cases on the grounds of "unknown perpetrator" out of the total agricultural crime cases closed in 2017–2021 (2,573 out of 3,674)

11%

the apprehensions rate of sheep and cattle thieves in 2017–2020 (753 out of 6,850)

NIS 1.2 billion

the Israel Police's assessment² of the direct and indirect economic damage³ caused in 2016 due to agricultural crimes

NIS 19 million

the damages cost of reported agricultural crime in 2021, according to the Border Police data

72,000 hours

were dedicated in 2019–2021 to escorting the Border Police detainees in the rural areas by Border Police officers. In fact, every year, at least 10 full-time police officers escorted detainees instead of carrying out detective and investigative tasks

6.5 out of 10


the degree of trust the public had in the police in rural areas in 2019

2 Inspector Yehuda Casey, "Policing strategies in the rural areas and the Police's handling of agricultural crime", from: **Principles in research 2019 – a collection of articles on police matters**, the Planning and Organization Division of the Israel Police, February 6, 2020, on page 122.



3 Direct damage – is the cost of the equipment, produce and animals. Indirect damage – is damage restoration, guarding costs and future losses.



Audit Actions


-  From April 2021 to July 2022, the State Comptroller's Office alternately audited the Police actions to rectify the deficiencies noted in the previous audit published in May 2017 on "The Israel Police's Handling of Agricultural Crime." Completion examinations were conducted at the Ministry of Public Security, the Israel Prison Service, and the Ministry of Justice – the State Attorney's Office.


Key Findings


-  **Reporting of Crimes by Farmers** – the previous audit found that the farmers' avoidance of reporting crimes stems from a lack of trust in the Police and its ability to apprehend the perpetrators of the crimes, and as a result, the data of the Police Planning and Organization Directorate do not accurately reflect the actual scope of crime. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was not rectified. In 2021, in most types of agricultural crime, there was an average decrease of about 30% in the number of reported incidents compared to 2017 (from 1,055 reported incidents in 2017 to 830 reported incidents in 2021). In surveys conducted by the Police in recent years, it was raised that the degree of trust the public has in the Police is moderate: according to the surveys' results, in 2017–2019, the degree of trust in the Police among the population in the rural areas (as well as among the urban areas population) was on average 6.3 out of 10. Furthermore, the farmers stated that a significant percentage of crime incidents are not reported to the Police due to a lack of trust in the enforcement systems and the lack of insurance for stolen property, which stems from the refusal of insurance companies to insure agricultural property. However, the Police did not examine whether under-reporting was recorded and its reasons. It was also found that the Border Police does not have an orderly action plan to encourage farmers to file a complaint due to agricultural crime.
-  **Data on the Damage Scope** – the previous audit found that the Police recording of agricultural crimes does not include data on the scope of stolen property nor the economic damage caused. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency had been rectified considerably. In 2020, the Border Police's Investigations and Intelligence Division started collecting data on agricultural crime's damage value. However, the data was manually entered into Excel tables based on verbal information included in the "case summary" in agricultural crime files. The Police do not record data to enable computerized retrieval of it from the investigation case management system. Moreover, according to the Police's response to the audit, the direct and indirect damage






documented by the Border Police's investigators about the cases in which complaints were filed and is based on a verbal assessment given by the complainant during the investigation. It should be noted that the Police do not calculate the indirect and ongoing damage according to uniform indicators, for example, guarding costs and insurance costs, and loss of future income. It should be noted that the assessment of the direct damage of agricultural crime in 2021, according to the Border Police data, was about NIS 19 million. At the same time, the Police Planning and Organization Directorate's estimate of direct and indirect damage is NIS 1.2 billion for 2016. The gap between these two estimates originates from different calculation methods and different measurements of the damage values.

 **Grounds for closing Agricultural Crime Cases** – the previous audit found that 94% of all cases opened in 2011–2015 for agricultural crime offenses were closed; Most of them (76%) were closed on the grounds of "unknown perpetrator." The follow-up audit raised that the deficiency was rectified to a small extent, and about 79% of the cases opened in 2017–2021 were closed. Moreover, the rate of closing cases on the grounds of an unknown perpetrator is about 70% of all closed agricultural crime cases. A significant reduction in the number of closed cases could indicate greater success by the Police in apprehending perpetrators of agricultural crimes.

 **Theft and Seizure of Sheep and Cattle** – the previous audit found that in 2011–2015, about 18,000 sheep and cattle were stolen, and 14 indictments were filed. On average, about 218 cases were opened in each of these years for the theft of sheep and cattle. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was rectified to a small extent. In 2017–2020, the rate of apprehensions of stolen sheep and cattle was low, about 11% – a total of 6,850 sheep and cattle were stolen, and 753 were caught. It should be noted that the decrease in the rate of cases of theft of sheep and cattle compared to the previous period could be due to the lack of reporting of all cases or from a decrease in the number of incidents.

 **Alternative Enforcement Procedures (administrative offense, conditional settlement procedure)** – according to data from 2020, about 57% of the thefts of agricultural produce amount up to NIS 1,000. This fact emphasizes the need to consider alternative procedures to today's criminal proceedings. Furthermore, in 2017–2020, there was a 30% increase in the number of cases of an invasion of agricultural land, and in total, 325 cases were opened in these years for invasion, but only 5 indictments were filed. The incursion is often accompanied by additional damages such as cutting fences, causing damage to equipment, and setting fire to agricultural areas. It is even a source of friction that sometimes reaches offenses of assault, threats, etc. However, even though in 2016, the need to regulate the incursion of agricultural land as an administrative offense was raised, as of March 2022, the strategic work on the matter has not been completed, and the issue has not been settled. Furthermore, the use of the conditional settlement procedure is implemented in 75% of the cases found suitable for the procedure – in 2017–2021, out of 301 cases that were transferred to the conditional

settlement procedure, 226 cases were concluded in this procedure. It should be noted that in those years, 4,602 cases were opened for agricultural crime.

-  **The Operational Concept of the Border Police Forces in the Rural Area** – the previous audit found that three strategic works were carried out on the operational concept of the forces in about seven years, with a limited assimilation time, making it impossible to examine the effect of the changes. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was not rectified. In the past 20 years, many fundamental changes have been made to the operational concept of Border Police units in rural areas and the Border Police mode of combating agricultural crime. These changes included a total change in the operating concept of Border Police forces in the rural area. Furthermore, since the previous audit ended in 2017, two fundamental organizational changes have been carried out: in 2017 – the operating concept of the "Border Police Bureau at the police station" was implemented, and in 2022 – the operating concept of creating four operational regions was implemented. The previous change from 2017 was made without an orderly drawing of lessons and an examination of the effectiveness of the change over the Border Police's operation.
-  **Escorting Detainees by the Rural Central Units** – the previous audit found that the rural central units themselves performed guarding, transporting, and escorting Border Police detainees because the MOUs between the Israel Prison Service (IPS) and the Police did not include escorting detainees from Border Police facilities. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was not rectified. In November 2019, an agreement was signed between the IPS and the Police, by which escort missions carried out by the IPS would include the detainees of all police units, including the Border Police. However, although two years have passed since the signing of the agreement, the rural central units are still required to escort Border Police detainees to the various prison facilities, and many work hours of police officers and investigators in the rural central units are dedicated to escorting detainees. Thus, in 2019–2021, traveling and waiting for detainees reached about 72,000 working hours. I.e., many working hours that were devoted to escorting detainees in each of those years, equals to at least 10 full-time police officers only escorting detainees instead of detecting and investigating.
-  **The Patrol Units in the Rural Areas** – the previous audit found that the number of patrols conducted was significantly lower than required by the procedure and that the rural patrol was sometimes diverted to reinforce police forces and other security tasks. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was not rectified. Since 2017, the rural patrol units are not been used as a response force to the 100 call-center incidents in the rural areas, and they are not present in the rural areas because they are used to reinforce police forces in Jerusalem or for various tasks of coping with crime in the urban areas. Furthermore, the organizational change from February 2022 also did not result in the allocation of permanent forces to patrols in the rural areas.



Data on the Scope of Agricultural Crime – the previous audit found a difference of about 60% between the data on the scope of agricultural crime that the Police Planning and Organization Directorate generated from its computerized systems and the data of the Border Police recorded manually. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was fully rectified. Guidelines were drawn up for accurate data entry in the Police information system, and the data of the two bodies were found to be uniform. It should be noted that at the same time, the Border Police monitors the agricultural crime data manually and keeps the more detailed data on internal Excel sheets.







The Agricultural Offenses Indictments Rate – the previous audit found that only 4.25% of the cases resulted in an indictment. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency has been rectified to a large extent. In 2017–2021, the rate of filing indictments out of all the agricultural crime cases opened was 18% on average. This significant increase indicates a positive trend in the Border Police's handling of agricultural crime

Staffing the Border Police's Investigations and Intelligence Division – the previous audit found that 22 out of 26 positions at the Border Police's Investigations and Intelligence Division were not filled, of which 6 were designated positions for handling agricultural crime. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was fully rectified, and as of January 2022, all 42 positions in the workforce headcount were filled.

Technological and Operational Means Available to the Border Police – in the previous audit, gaps were found between the Police and the Border Police regarding technological and operational means; moreover, the central units were not provided with technological means and advanced intelligence-gathering tools required for them to carry out their tasks. According to the follow-up audit, the deficiency was rectified to a large extent. The Border Police's Investigations and Intelligence Division have been reinforced in recent years, thanks, among other things, to the contribution of the 'Intelligence Center' to strengthen its intelligence and technological capabilities. The rural central units were reorganized and strengthened, and an intelligence division was established in each of them. However, the 'Intelligence Center' is still not fully available to the Border Police units combating agricultural crime.



Key Recommendations

-  It is recommended that the Border Police complete the strategic work examining the causes of the under-reporting of agricultural crimes and formulate a systematic plan to bolster the trust of the public living in the rural areas in the Police and to encourage farmers to report cases of agricultural crime. It is also recommended that the information on the possibility of filing a complaint digitally without going to the police station be circulated among farmers.
-  It is recommended that the Police promote, in preparation for the 2023 working year, the development of the investigation case management system enabling computerized documentation of the scope of the damage and the retrieval of data about it, and consider a methodology for assessing all the direct and indirect damage of agricultural crime. This may assist the Police to make decisions regarding the fight against agricultural crime based on economic estimates, and it can prioritize tasks to increase the efficiency of its operation.
-  It is recommended that the Police set annual goals to reduce the "unknown perpetrators" as grounds for closing agricultural crime cases.
-  It is recommended that the Police and the Border Police examine the organizational change currently being carried out, compared to the changes made in the past, while drawing lessons from the gaps created as a result of each change and considering whether these changes help the Border Police cope with agricultural crime. Both bodies should determine a stable and effective organizational structure that may reduce agricultural crime.
-  Given the difficulties expected by the representatives of the regional government, the farmers, and the regional councils due to the absence of rural patrols – it is recommended that the Border Police and the Police examine the effect of the organizational change on the sense of security among the citizens in the rural areas, focusing on the agricultural areas patrols on an ongoing basis.
-  The Israel Prison Service and the Police should comply with the agreement between the parties regarding detainees escorting. The Ministry of Public Security should assist to summarize in more detail the manner of escorting the detainees from the Border Police facilities to the detention centers and the courts, as required by the agreement. Hence, the time of the central units' detectives and investigators will be devoted mainly to investigative and detective tasks and not to guarding, transporting, and escorting detainees.



The Extent of Rectification of the Key Deficiencies Noted in the Previous Report

The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency/ Recommendation in the Previous Audit Report	The Extent of Rectification of the Deficiency Noted in the Follow-Up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Missing data on the scope of agricultural crime – differences between the Border Police data and the Police Planning and Organization Directorate data	The Police, the Border Police	60% difference between the Police and the Border Police data raised fundamental doubts about the correctness of the police data on agricultural crime.				
Missing data on the scope of agricultural crime – avoidance of reporting crimes	The Police, the Border Police	The farmers' avoidance of reporting crimes stems from a lack of trust in the Police and its ability to apprehend the perpetrators. Hence, the Police Planning and Organization Directorate data do not faithfully reflect the actual scope of crime.				
Missing data on the scope of agricultural crime – lack of data regarding the extent of damage	The Police, the Border Police	The recording of agricultural offenses by the Police does not include data on the scope of stolen property or the economic damage.				

The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency/ Recommendation in the Previous Audit Report	The Extent of Rectification of the Deficiency Noted in the Follow-Up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
The Police's handling of agricultural crime investigation cases – the responsibility for handling agricultural crime cases	The Police, the Border Police	More than 40% of agricultural crime cases were opened and handled by the Police and not by the Border Police, even though the responsibility for handling agricultural crime rests with the Border Police.				
The Police's handling of agricultural crime investigation cases – rate of indictments for agricultural crimes	The Police, the Border Police	Only 4.25% of the cases resulted in an indictment.				
The Police's handling of agricultural crime investigation cases – theft and seizure of sheep and cattle	The Border Police	In 2011–2015, about 18,000 sheep and cattle were stolen.				
The Police's handling of agricultural crime investigation cases – filing of indictments for theft of sheep and cattle	The Police, the Border Police	In 2011–2015, 14 indictments were filed. On average, about 218 cases were opened in each of these years for the theft of sheep and cattle.				



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			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
The Police's handling of Agricultural Crime Investigation Cases – grounds for closing agricultural crime cases	The Police, the Border Police	94% of all cases opened in 2011–2015 for agricultural crimes were closed under these grounds: unknown perpetrator – 76%, lack of evidence – 14%, and lack of public interest – 10%.				
The Border Police units dealing with agricultural crime – the operational concept of Border Police forces in rural areas	The Police, the Border Police	Three strategic works were carried out on the operational concept of the forces in about seven years with a limited assimilation time that made it impossible to examine the effect of the changes.				
The Border Police units dealing with agricultural crime – staffing of positions at the Border Police's Investigations and Intelligence Division	The Border Police	22 out of 26 positions were not filled, of which 6 are dedicated positions for handling agricultural crime.				



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			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
The Border Police units dealing with agricultural crime – technological and operational means available to the Border Police	The Police, the Border Police	Gaps were found between the Police and the Border Police regarding technological and operational means, and the central units were not provided with the technological means and advanced intelligence-gathering tools required to carry out their tasks.				
The Border Police units dealing with agricultural crime – rural patrols – escorting detainees at the expense of operational activity	The Police, the Border Police	The rural police central units performed guarding, transporting, and escorting detainees because the MOUs between the IPS and the police did not include escorting detainees from Border Police facilities.				
The Border Police units dealing with agricultural crime – patrol units in the rural areas	The Police, the Border Police	The number of patrols conducted was significantly smaller than required by the procedure, and the rural patrol was sometimes diverted in favor of reinforcing police forces and other security tasks.				



Summary

Agricultural crime harms the various branches of agriculture, and the direct and indirect economic damage caused by it was estimated at NIS 1.2 billion in 2016. The previous audit noted deficiencies in the Police and the Border Police handling of agricultural crimes and over the structure of the Border Police and the units that are supposed to prevent such incidents.

The follow-up audit raised that some of the deficiencies have not yet been rectified – the degree of trust the public in the rural area has in the Police is moderate, and farmers are discouraged by the "Police's incompetence in dealing with agricultural crime" and "feel neglected by the state"; The rate of closing of cases on the grounds of "unknown perpetrator" is about 70% of the total agricultural crime cases being closed, and this indicates the difficulty in apprehending criminals who commit agricultural crime; In the last 20 years, the Border Police has made frequent changes in its organizational structure, and today the rural patrol units do not operate regularly and continuously in the agricultural areas, and as a result the sense of security of the residents in the rural area is affected.

The Police and the Border Police should prevent agricultural crime, among other things, by increasing the presence of Border Police units on the ground, as a prominent presence of forces will create a deterrent for criminals, reducing the number of agricultural crime cases. In addition, the Police and the Border Police should ensure that the time of the Border Police detectives and investigators is devoted mainly to investigative and detection tasks and not to guarding, transporting, and escorting detainees. Furthermore, they should formulate a systematic plan to strengthen public trust in rural areas. The Police and the Border Police should examine the organizational changes made by the Border Police while drawing lessons from the resulting gaps, and it is also appropriate to examine the effect of these changes on the citizens' sense of security in the rural areas.