

Dead livestock may be cases of insurance fraud

By Patrick Seitz

Staff writer

The public usually has two explanations when livestock are found slaughtered in rural areas: satanic cults or UFOs.

Bob Fletcher, Illinois State Police public information officer, said there is another possibility — insurance fraud.

Prize livestock used for breeding or cows that are enormous milk producers can be as "valuable as race horses" and worth many thousands of dollars, Mr. Fletcher said.

"We've found that a lot of it (livestock mutilation) tends to be done by farmers to collect insurance," he said.

"The law enforcement community is divided into two camps," he said. "There are those who actually search for satanic cults, and there are others in law enforcement who think this is largely the invention of pulp media."

"I'm enormously skeptical of it," Mr. Fletcher said. But he admitted that good arguments could be made

on both sides for why farm animals occasionally are found mutilated.

Mr. Fletcher cited one case where lightning killed a prize farm animal and the insurance company wouldn't have covered the loss. So the rancher made the accident look like a satanic ritual killing.

Bureau County Sheriff Jack Narczewski said voters in his county made cattle mutilations a campaign issue in 1982 during the election of his predecessor.

"They were accusing the sheriff at the time of not doing enough to stop the Satan worshipers," he said.

Mercer County Sheriff Marvin Thiryacre said his department has investigated about three cattle mutilations in the past few years, with the last one occurring in the summer of 1986.

In each case, the cattle's throats were cut with a sharp instrument and certain organs were removed, he said.

Mr. Thiryacre said his department didn't find anything that made him believe a satanic cult committed the slayings.

"We didn't put much weight on it" at the time, he said. "Then we got to thinking about it."

Reports of animal slayings fluctuate the same as sightings of UFOs and flying saucers, Mr. Fletcher said.

DISPATCH, Moline, IL - Feb. 12, 1988 CR: L. Whitehurst