



Although Chris Hollands, chairman of the NFU's Dartford and North West Kent branch, has plenty to look glum about, the earth mound in this field entrance effectively keeps fly tippers out.

case all they needed to do was to keep watch on the lane one evening and they would have caught 20 travellers illegally dumping."

Preventing as much fly-tipping as possible and clearing up dumped material from his land has proved expensive. Over the past two years Nick Ottewell calculates he has spent about £2,000 disposing of refrigerators and freezers and the like at official tips. He invested another £6,000 to £7,000 on buying high specification locks for numerous gates to prevent illegal dumpers accessing fields and other measures like placing mounds of soil in gateways to prevent tipping lorries backing into them and discharging their loads.

One field, of 10 acres, has proved impossible to protect, though. As a result it has been a frequent dumping site for items such as refrigerators and freezers and cars, some of which have been torched. Because the field can no longer be cropped it has been put into permanent set-aside.

Although Nick Ottewell's preventative measures are effective the fly tippers are always able to find somewhere to dump their loads. "The only answer is to catch them, which doesn't need rocket science to achieve, and impose severe penalties," he urges.

However, **Chris Hollands**, chairman of the NFU's Dartford and North West Kent branch, who farms some 600 acres in the Brands Hatch area and suffers constantly from fly

tipping, says he is not sure that there is a solution to the problem.

"We've discussed the issue at length with our MP, council and others and none of them have come up with an answer," he adds. "What would help is a major government initiative on recycling and incineration although a lot of people don't like that idea."

Chris Hollands reckons that the raising of household tip barriers by some councils has been of help for people with large 4x4 vehicles. So there is no excuse for their owners to fly tip, particularly since councils will collect larger household items like freezers, washing machines and furniture from houses free of charge or for a small fee.

Where practicable he has blocked his lay-by type gateways with earth mounds or steel barriers to prevent fly-tipping. But that is not possible where they are frequently used by farm traffic. "In these cases sometimes we go along in the mornings to find half a tipper load of rubbish blocking the way," he says.

Experience has shown him that he cannot afford to lower his guard against fly tippers. For example an engineer working on a telephone mast in one of his fields inadvertently left the gate open (it's usually locked), allowing some villain to tip about 60 old tyres in the field overnight.

Toby Williams, who grows 30 acres of intensive vegetables, mainly runner beans and courgettes, at Upper Ruxley,

near Sidcup, Kent, also admits that there's no easy solution to fly tipping or the abandoning of old cars in the countryside.

However, he suggests that one solution to small load dumping by travellers in particular would be council-subsidised tips usable possibly for a small charge or even free. That would be much cheaper than council staff and vehicles trawling country lanes for rubbish as happens now. It would also relieve growers of some of the time and expense of removing dumped material from their land.

"I don't know whether council tax payers would tolerate their money being spent in this way but it would certainly save councils the considerable expense of having to collect dumped rubbish," asserts Toby Williams who serves London wholesale markets and catering suppliers.

Despite farming on the urban fringe, Toby Williams, vice-chairman of the NFU's Dartford and North West Kent branch, has had relatively little trouble from fly tippers. This is possibly because much of his land is alongside a busy road. Nevertheless, recently he found some propane gas cylinders in one of his fields and its hedge adjacent to a bus stop where the vehicle carrying the cylinders must have parked.

Richard Wilson, head of direct services, **Sevenoaks District Council**, whose area includes a large chunk of London's urban fringe, insists that there is no shortage of licenced tips for commercial waste. Depending on the type of material involved, the operators are charged £20 to £50/tonne although tyres cost up to £1.00 each because they have to be

shredded.

"These costs are passed on to the operators' customers and no doubt that also applies when the material is fly tipped," he reckons. "If we had the resources to set up enforcement and bring fly tippers to court it would be possible to impose big fines that would act as a deterrent. The trouble is that these people tend to dump stuff down quiet roads in the early hours when they cannot be detected."

One possible answer would be for the police or environment agency officers to stop loaded vehicles to see if their drivers have the proper waste carrier documentation, including waste disposal forms, suggests Richard Wilson. But here again extra resources would be required and their availability is very doubtful.

Note: Over the past two years Albert Vinson's annual turnover has soared from some £6 million to £15 million. Apart from the crops they grow around Swanley and the Isle of Grain, they have over 1,000 acres of vegetables produced for them under contract, including around 200 acres of leeks in Cambridgeshire.

The crops are washed (if necessary), sorted and packed in their packhouse alongside the A20 just north of Swanley. Here a new state-of-the-art machine shreds and packs brassicas year-round and for about nine summer weeks French beans are hand-sorted, packed and weighed, a labour intensive procedure, particularly since the beans are packed with all of their stalks facing the same way in the packs. Most of Vinson's produce goes to supermarkets, mainly Morrisons and Summerfield.



Foreign labour picks Albert Vinson's dwarf beans. The picking season lasts for about nine weeks, starting around mid-July, with yields averaging 5t/acre or 3t/acre of packed beans.