

Share the roads with farmers this fall

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Fall is the time of year when farmers harvest their corn and soybean crop. Corn silage harvest will begin very soon in Jefferson and Lewis County. This means that we will see an increased amount of slow moving farm equipment on the rural roads. It is legal for farmers to drive their farm equipment on public roads. Both motorists and farmers must take proper precautions to share the roadways safely.

Farm tractors are not designed for high speed and usually travel at less than twenty five miles per hour or less. New York State law requires that all farm equipment display a slow moving vehicle emblem, a triangular fluorescent orange sign with a red reflective border. The sign is placed between two and six feet above the road in the middle of the rear of the farm equipment or tractor. These signs can easily be seen from five hundred feet away. If you are driving on the road and approach a vehicle displaying a slow moving vehicle emblem you should slow down as if you were approaching a stoplight.

Some of the large farm tractors weigh over twenty tons and travel slowly which can make a person wonder how you could possibly not see the piece of farm equipment or rear end a farm tractor with your vehicle. It is really easy to misjudge the speed you are traveling and the speed of the farm equipment in front of you. To put this into perspective, if you are traveling at fifty five miles per hour and you approach a tractor traveling at fifteen miles per hour it only takes five seconds to close a three hundred foot gap or the length of a football field. This is why it is so important for motorist to begin to slow down as soon as they see farm equipment traveling on the road.

Motorists must also understand that it is illegal to pass farm equipment in a no passing zone. They need to be treated as if they were another vehicle on the road and not a nuisance. You need to exercise caution and patience when considering whether or not to pass slow moving farm equipment. If you slow down to follow a tractor traveling at a speed of twenty miles per hour for one mile it will only add three minutes to your trip. Farm equipment may be wider than it looks when you are following from behind, making it critical to have a wide, clear lane to enter when passing.

Left turn collisions are one of the most common farm vehicle accidents on public roads. This type of accident occurs when the farm equipment is making a left hand turn when being passed by a motorist. This happens because large farm equipment is sometimes forced to make wide left turns, especially when towing other farm equipment such as a wagon. Field entrances and driveways may be so narrow that the farm equipment operator may have to pull over to the right side of the road in order to make a wide left turn. Sometimes when this happens the following motorist thinks the farmer is pulling over to let them pass. When you approach farm equipment that has slowed down or stopped in the road, look for field entrances, driveways or gates on the left side of the road that may indicate a left turn.

Farmers must also use caution when operating farm equipment on the road. The equipment should have properly operating brakes and be marked clearly. The slow moving vehicle signs need to be clean or replaced when they become faded. If at all possible, farmers should avoid operating farm equipment on roads when weather conditions restrict visibility or in the hours near sunrise and sunset.

Both motorists and farm operators need to learn to share the roadways in the county. Motorists need to be alert, patient and slow down when they see farm equipment on the road. Again, this is a very busy time of year for farmers and we can expect to see more tractors traveling on the roads this time of year. Let's make this and every harvest season a safe one.