Share the Road – Fall Harvest Safety

The following article was written by Ed Lentz, Hancock County Extension Educator and revised by Jim Hoorman, Putnam County Extension Educator

Harvest season has begun in Putnam County and during this time, motorists should aware that they will be sharing rural roads with tractors, combines, grain carts, and other farm machinery. Keep in mind, all of the roads in this area pass through farm country and may have farm equipment traveling on them.

Motorists need to be prepared for these slow moving vehicles and to patiently remind themselves that agriculture is a major industry that adds to economic health and well-being of our community. Vehicle collisions are often the result of differences in speed between slower-moving farm equipment and passenger cars and trucks. Many times the vehicle driver has not allowed enough time to react when they recognize farm equipment on the road.

Farmers also need to think about safety and be considerate of other drivers. It is critical that they do their part to be seen on the road. They also need to take extra caution since they are often working long hours in isolated environments and may suffer from fatigue when leaving fields and enter the road system.

The Agricultural Safety team of the Ohio State University Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering has made a list of safety tips for farmers and non-farmers sharing the road. Here are some Tips for farmers driving farm equipment:

• Mount a Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem to the last piece of equipment being hauled. The emblem should be pointed up, placed 2-6 feet above the ground, as near to rear center as possible.
• Stay alert at all times to avoid a serious accident. Do not use the cell phone or two-way radio while operating equipment on public roads.
• Keep a constant lookout for pedestrians, animals, mailboxes, steep ditch embankments, and other roadway obstacles.
• Slow down for sharp curves, areas that are hard to see due to trees or shrubs, or when going down a hill.
• Consider using an escort vehicle to follow behind.
• Be cognizant of high traffic times, usually mornings and late afternoons.

Tips for Motorists:

• Farm machinery has a legal right to use public roads just as other motor vehicles.
• Farm machinery can unexpectedly turn onto a public road from a field or driveway.
• Farm machinery travels slower than normal traffic, often at speeds of 25 miles per hour or less. Automobile drivers must quickly identify farm equipment and slow down immediately to avoid rear end crashes.
• Farm machinery operators may not be able to see you because the large equipment or a load can block part of their rear view. If you cannot see the driver, the driver cannot see you.
• Slow moving farm machinery traveling less than 25 miles per hour should display a slow moving vehicle emblem on the back of the equipment. This is a quickly identifiable sign to other motorists.
• Machinery that is half on the road and half on the shoulder may suddenly move completely onto the road.
• Extra-wide farm machinery may take up more than one lane to avoid hitting obstacles such as mailboxes and road signs.

More information on rural roadway safety may be found in the OSU Fact Sheet, Boosting Visibility of Ag Equipment (http://ohioline.osu.edu/aex-fact/pdf/AEX_598_08.pdf) and on the OSU Ag Safety and Health website, http://agsafety.osu.edu.” (Lentz, 2014)