

Farm Management

Stay safe and legal while traveling

Country Counsel

By ROBERT MOORE

AS traffic continues to increase on Ohio roads, the need to understand laws related to farm machinery on roadways is critical for farmers. Ohio law sets out specific requirements for farm

Key Points

- Understand and comply with highway laws to avoid legal complications.
- Know when to display an SMV emblem or SIS on machinery or trailers.
- Check OSU Extension bulletin for requirements on lighting.

machinery on the road. Noncompliance with these laws greatly increases the liability exposure of producers operating on roadways.

Farm equipment is exempt from width restrictions. However, Ohio law also prohibits motor vehicles from driving left-of-center. Many times on smaller roads, farm equipment is too wide to not be left-of-center. Which law prevails?

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled on this very issue and determined that over-wide farm equipment did not violate the left-of-center law. The court reasoned that if the left-of-center law was enforced against farm equipment, many farmers would not be able to move their equipment. Interestingly, the Ohio Supreme Court suggested the Ohio Legislature adopt a law that would prevent moving over-wide farm equipment after dark. The Legislature has yet to adopt this recommendation.

Put SMV signs to use

Slow-moving vehicle emblems are well-known to farmers but often misused or not maintained. SMV signs must be used on farm equipment traveling less than 25 mph. The sign must be mounted in a visible location so as to be seen from 500 feet away. Faded and rusted emblems should be discarded and replaced to ensure proper visibility requirements. SMV signs may not be used on farm equipment traveling faster than 25 mph. This includes machinery being hauled on a truck or trailer; the SMV emblem should be removed or covered during transport.

Some farm equipment is designed to operate at speeds greater than 25 mph. These machines must display a speed identification symbol in addition to an SMV sign. The SIS must be displayed even if the machine is not actually traveling faster than 25 mph; it only has to be designed to run over 25 mph to require the SIS. The designed speed of the equipment must be included on the SIS. Any implements, wagons or trailers being pulled by a "fast tractor" must also display the SIS and SMV sign. Farm machinery may not be operated at speeds in excess of 25 mph unless the driver has a valid driver's license or commercial driver's license.

Proper lighting on equipment is important. Lighting requirements are dependent upon the type of machine and in some cases the manufactured date. Ohio State University Extension offers a fact sheet on ag equipment lighting, online at ohioline.osu.edu/aex-fact/pdf/AEX_598_08.pdf. Or, pick one up at the local OSU Extension office. An important point with lighting is that a burnt-out light is like having no light at all. Lights should be checked daily before equipment is operated on the road.

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