Many will be sharing rural roads

It is crunch time for local farmers.

By May 1, farmers usually are done with activities such as spraying fields with herbicides, applying fertilizer, and tillage. They also have begun to plant corn and soybeans.

However, the cold and wet April provided farmers with few days for field operations. Thus, planting crops will occur at the same time that other field activities need to be done. Farmers will have to decide which activity to do as the first good days for field operations unfold this week.

Farmers know that historically the best yields occur when they finish planting in the first part of May. This may be truer this year since many early weather predictions are calling for an abnormally hot and dry July.

Thus, farmers will be putting in long days to get things done over the next few weeks. To get these tasks done, a large amount of farm equipment will be on the roads.

Road traffic in general increases on sunny spring days, maybe more so this year since we had only had a few nice days in April. The combination of city people driving in the country and farmers moving equipment can often cause problems on rural roads.

Drivers need to realize that farm equipment is much larger today than 10 years ago. Drivers need to slow down when they see the slow-moving vehicle sign and flashing lights on equipment. They need to be patient before passing these vehicles.

Some equipment will be moved to fields by trucks pulling trailers loaded with planters and tillage equipment. Drivers need to be careful when passing large tillage equipment and planters, which may move in an unexpected manner.

Be prepared for left turns by farm equipment. Large equipment needs to make a wide turn to line up with driveways or field entry points.

Be extra cautious at times when vision is impaired, such as dusk, sunrise, and glaring sunshine. Be aware that traffic behind you may be attempting to pass.

The agricultural community has established recommendations for farmers to encourage safety on rural roads. The highlights of these are:

- At all times, a “slow-moving vehicle” emblem is required.
- Headlights and taillights are required until 30 minutes after sunrise, and for 30 minutes before sunset.
- Headlights and taillights are required during daylight hours in inclement weather, including fog and rain.
- Additional extremitly lighting is required on dual-wheeled tractors.
- Amber flashers and turn signals are recommended at all times.
- Ideally, towed implements should have reflectors, lights, and a slow-moving vehicle emblem. Law requires these items when the implement blocks the lighting marking configuration on the tractor.
- Safety cables or chains should be used in any towing situation.
- Lock tractor brakes together.
- Wear seat belt while operating tractors with rollover protective structures.
- Ohio law states that only one wagon/implement may be towed behind any vehicle with two exceptions:
  1. Towing with a tractor: More than one wagon/implement may be towed. While no maximum is indicated, common sense and safety should play a role.
  2. Towing with a pickup or straight truck: A truck designed by the manufacturer to carry a load of less than one-half ton and not more than two tons may tow two wagons/implement.
- Use an escort vehicle when possible.

More information on road safety may be found in the publication, Transporting Farm Equipment. The publication may be downloaded for free at https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/PPP/PPP-83.pdf.

Be especially careful on the roads the next several weeks. Be aware of farm equipment. Sporting activities have a lot of makeup games and farmers have a lot to do in a short time. All of us will be sharing the roads. Let’s drive safely out there.

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lentz can be heard with Vawn Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WRXA-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.