Be careful on rural roads at harvest

Farmers have started to harvest soybeans the past two weeks. Soybean harvest will be extended this year because some beans were planted late following a wet spring in some areas, or were planted as a double crop.

Double-crop soybeans are planted after the wheat harvest in late June or early July. Corn harvest will be starting in the next several weeks and continue into November as a result of some fields being planted or replanted in June because of wet spring conditions.

However, the abnormally warm summer will result in most corn being harvested earlier than normal.

Harvest will cause large and slow-moving farm vehicles to be on narrow rural roads, such as combines, tractor-trailers, moving combine heads, tractors pulling grain carts, and grain trucks.

Fewer hours of daylight as the earth moves toward the winter solstice, and limited number of harvest days may cause a large number of farm vehicles to be on rural roads at one time.

Most of Hancock County is rural and farm vehicles and equipment may travel on all roads except Interstate 75. Motorists need to be prepared for these slow-moving vehicles and to patiently remind themselves that agriculture is a major industry that adds to the economic health and well-being of our community.

Vehicle collisions are often the result of differences in speed between slow-moving farm equipment and passenger cars and trucks. Many times the car or truck driver has not allowed enough time to react when they recognize farm equipment on the road.

Unfortunately, accidents with farm vehicles are often severe and injuries occur.

Motorists can improve road safety by following these tips:
- Remember 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 of harvested grain 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.
- Wait for a safe place to pass, keep your headlights on, and avoid tailgating. Be prepared for the farm equipment to swing wide to make a right or left turn into a field.
- Watch for debris dropped by trucks hauling grain, and mud from vehicles leaving fields. All of which may make roads more slippery and hazardous.
- Deer activity will increase as they search for new areas as the corn is harvested.
- Do not use a cellphone or be distracted by other activities while driving on rural roads during the peak harvest season.
- Farmers can improve road safety by following these safety tips:
  - Use a Slow-Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem on the last piece of equipment being hauled.
  - Utilize safe travel routes between fields and take into account potential problems with automobile traffic and narrow roads.
  - Try to avoid high-traffic times, usually mornings and late afternoons.
  - Use caution with extra-wide farm machinery, which may take up more than one lane, to avoid hitting obstacles such as mailboxes and road signs.
  - Slow down for sharp curves or when going down a hill.
  - Use an escort vehicle to follow behind slow harvest vehicles.
  - Avoid driving on roads after long harvest hours when feeling fatigue, which may affect reaction time.

More information on rural roadway safety may be found at https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/axx892267 and on the OSU Ag Safety and Health website.

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