Share the road this planting season

After last year’s disastrous planting season, farmers are anxious to get this year’s crop in the ground. They need a stretch of dry weather to get a good start on planting corn and soybean.

They know that research has shown that early planted corn and soybean has the best chance for large yields. However, rain events will determine the planting date, and often planting occurs later than ideal.

If soil conditions are right, farmers will start planting at the end of April. They would like to have their corn planted by May 10 and their soybean planted by May 25.

If soils are fit, they will push themselves to get as many acres they can planted in a short time. To accomplish this, they will use large planting equipment and work long hours. Thus, once the weather is fit for planting, a large amount of farm equipment will be on the roads.

Besides more farm equipment on the roads, traffic in general increases on sunny spring days, maybe more so in years of limited pleasant and sunny days in April. The combination of non-farm people driving in the country and farmers moving equipment can often cause problems on rural roads.

Traffic may be worse this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals may want to get out and drive on sunny days after being stuck in their homes for the past month.

Drivers need to be real­ize that farm equipment is much larger today than 10 years ago. Tractors are larger and faster. 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

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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 unsuspected 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 that vision is impaired such as dusk, sunrise and glaring sunshine. Be aware that traffic behind you may be attempting to pass. Also, technology allows farmers to plant at night, so they may be leaving fields after dark.

Besides asking non-farm drivers to be extra careful, the agricultural community has established rules and recommendations for farmers to encourage safety on rural roads. The highlights of these rules are listed below.

- At all times, a “slow-moving vehicle” emblem is required.
- Headlights and taillights are required until 30 minutes after sunrise and 30 minutes before sunset.
- Headlights and taillights are required during day hours in inclement weather, including fog and rain.
- Additional extremity lighting is required on dual-wheeled tractors.
- Amber flashes 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/markings configuration on the tractor.
- Safety cables or chains should be used in any towing situation.
- Lock tractor brakes together.
- Wear a seat belt while operating tractors with rollover protective structures (ROPS).
- 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 not less than one-half ton and not more than two tons may tow two wagons/implements.
- Use an escort vehicle when possible.

Agriculture is a major source of income for the community and has been designated as an essential industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Be especially careful on the roads the next several weeks. Be aware of farm equipment. All of us will be sharing the roads, so drive safely.


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