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LEADER



BE SAFE.
Be Seen.



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Be Seen.





It's late in the afternoon, and you're so close to being finished with harvest. You have just enough time to move the combine from the field you're in to the one you need to cut tomorrow. You barely pull on to the road before a line of honking cars seem to appear out of nowhere.

You've waited for weeks to get in the hayfield for the last cutting, and finally get a break in the weather. You're headed back to the main farm with the mower and notice a car behind you trying to pass on a double yellow even though your mower extends into the left lane and you have nowhere to pull over.

Both of these scenarios sound all too familiar for farmers. Like other commuters, farmers are just trying to get to and from their jobs, and then get home to see their families. While passenger drivers need to stay alert for equipment on rural roads, it is our job as farmers to be vigilant that tractors and equipment are visible. From 2015 to 2019, there were over 1,000 accidents on North Carolina roadways involving tractors, equipment, and farm vehicles.

Many motorists do not recognize the silhouette of tractors and equipment, so farmers must be diligent to ensure they are seen. Despite your best efforts, there will be times when passenger vehicles will line up behind equipment due to factors out of your control such

as wide equipment, lack of space to pull over, or no passing zones. But, as in athletics, the best offense is a good defense – never assume that other drivers know or understand your intentions.

So what can you do?

First, know the rules and be prepared. Be familiar with NC DMV laws regarding farm equipment transportation and consider utilizing additional lights and flagging. Provide training for all farm workers who might operate equipment on roadways, and never allow anyone under 14 to operate farm equipment on roadways!

Next, make sure you can be seen before you hit the road. Because one of the most common rural roadway accidents are rear end collisions, farmers should pay special attention to maintaining SMV signs, lighting, and reflectors. Replacing broken light covers and faded SMV signs, repairing light wiring, cleaning dirt and debris off lenses, and adding rear view mirrors help to ensure that you are seen.

"Flashing lights can be confusing to other drivers not familiar with farm equipment," says LaMar Grafft, Associate Director of the NC AgroMedicine Institute. "A yellow rotating beacon on top of the cab is very visible to those behind you – it's really a good addition.

The beacons are battery powered with a magnetic base, so they are easy to take on and off. It is one more step for getting ready to move equipment, but if it gets you home to your family, it's worth it, right?"

Grafft also suggests being very aware of the route you are driving and avoid high traffic times, such as a shift change at a plant or factory, or school drop-off and pick-up times. Studies have shown that 82% of farm equipment collisions involve a non-farm vehicle, and adjusting driving times accordingly can alleviate potential problems.

Finally, be patient and communicate clearly once you are on the road. Pull over when possible to allow cars to safely pass – traffic build-up can exacerbate aggressive driving. Be particularly mindful when turning; added implements could block turn signals, so check to make sure signal lights are visible before entering roadways. Be cautious using hand signals to turn, as motorists often misinterpret the left turn hand signal as an indication to pass which could result in a left turn sideswipe.

Tractor and equipment accidents have a lasting impact on farm families, communities, and the industry. This fall, let's do our best to be visible to motorists, share the roads with caution, and most importantly GET HOME TOGETHER!

BE SAFE. Be Seen.

Repair or replace SMV emblems, lighting, reflectors, and/or flagging on farm equipment as needed. Inspect each time equipment will be on a roadway to ensure visibility.

Determine if additional lighting, reflectors, or flagging is needed to increase visibility.

Purchase and have replacement lights, reflectors, flagging, and SMV signs on hand before they are needed.

Adjust travel routes if possible to avoid peak passenger travel times.

Use an additional escort vehicle in high traffic or low visibility areas.

Be aware of traffic behind you that may not anticipate your movements and allow them to pass when it is safe and legal to do so.

