

# WFB, Dept. of Transportation, Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Join forces to help keep roadways safe during harvest

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MADISON – As the weather gets cooler and the days get shorter, it is the unofficial signal that fall harvest is starting. Tractors and other implements of husbandry (IOH) are allowed to operate on Wisconsin roadways but are often large and slow-moving which can cause confusion for drivers sharing the roads.

“We must all remember that everyone on the roadway has family and friends they want to return home to,” said Wisconsin Farm Bureau President Joe Bragger. “Farmers and motorists need to respect each other and work together to keep Wisconsin’s roadways safe this fall.”

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), there have been 1,714 crashes involving farm equipment, resulting in 834 injuries and 29 fatalities in the past decade.

Three scenarios drivers and farmers should know how to handle are passing an IOH, left-hand turns and braking distance needed at controlled intersections.

**Passing:** In 2014, it became illegal to pass an IOH which include farm tractors and farm machinery, or an Ag-Commercial Motor Vehicle, trucks that are specially designed for agricultural work, in a no-passing zone. Motorists should wait until they enter a passing zone when considering going around a slow-moving vehicle. Farmers should not pull over in a no-passing zone to let vehicles pass, unless the road shoulder condition and width can allow for the farm machinery to completely

move onto the shoulder. Farmers should also not wave a driver forward to pass them. While these actions seem courteous, it sends mixed signals and isn't encouraged. In a passing zone, or if shoulder width permits, farmers are obligated to yield the roadway to the overtaking vehicle so they do not impede the normal movement of traffic.

**Left-hand turn:** It can turn into a dangerous situation when a farmer is attempting to make a left-hand turn. Farm equipment, especially the tractor, will likely have two flashing amber or yellow lights on the cab or tire fenders of the tractor when in operation on the roadway. When a farmer signals to turn, the light will continue to flash in the direction the farmer is turning. The other light will go solid. For motorists, this is a very important distinction to recognize. For farm tractors or farm machinery without turn signals, hand signals should be used to indicate the operator's intention to turn.

**A controlled intersection:** When a motorist legally passes large farm equipment within a very short distance of a controlled intersection (stop sign or stop lights), this action can dramatically impact the reaction time and braking distance for the farm equipment operator. Farm equipment is much heavier than a normal passenger vehicle which makes having adequate braking distance critical for the operator.

"Safety along our roadways requires everyone to do their part," said WisDOT Secretary-designee Craig Thompson. "Motorists are reminded to share the road, watch their speed and be very cautious around farm vehicles. Ag vehicle operators need to use appropriate lights, signage and signals, and comply with weight restrictions."

The [Wisconsin Department of Transportation](#) recommends drivers should slow down immediately whenever they see a slow-moving vehicle emblem (orange and red triangle) on the rear of a tractor or other piece of equipment. This emblem indicates that the farm machine usually travels slower than 25 mph. Stay alert, focused and patient when passing a slow-moving agricultural vehicle in an area where passing is legal.

"Wisconsin's \$104.8 billion agricultural industry plays a major role in our state's economy and our rural communities," said DATCP Secretary-designee Randy

Romanski. “Especially during the busy harvest season, farmers and drivers alike should stay alert and patient with each other on the roads. Together, we can help ensure that our high-quality agricultural products keep moving and our roads stay safe.”

Farmers are asked to comply with the proper lighting and marking requirements to draw attention to the size, shape and speed of agricultural vehicles and to alert drivers that caution is required. There are specific requirements for different types of equipment. This information can be found [here](#).

Farmers should also know their local weight restrictions. Generally, agricultural weight limits are 23,000 pounds per axle or 92,000 pounds gross vehicle weight, dependent on number of axles and axle spacing, and subject to seasonal or special postings. Farmers can find more information about weight limits from the [Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection](#) and [Wisconsin Department of Transportation](#).

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation is the state’s largest general farm organization. Made up of 61 county Farm Bureaus, it represents agriculturists and farms of every size, commodity and management style.