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Safety on Iowa Roads: Sharing the Road with Farm Vehicles

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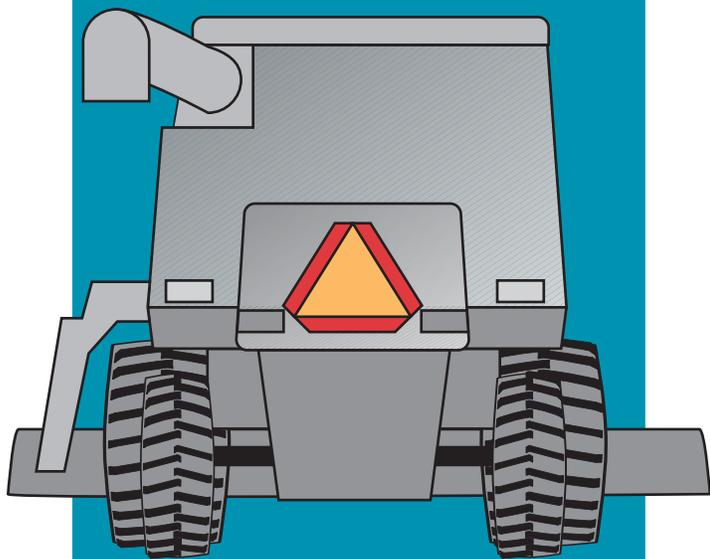
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Safety on Iowa Roads

Sharing the Road with Farm Vehicles



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
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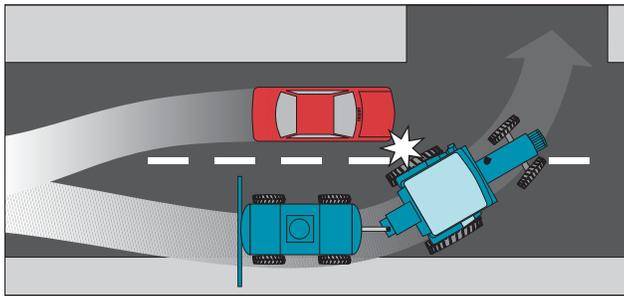
If you've driven on many of Iowa's rural roads, you know how your spine tingles when you pop over a hill and come upon a slow-moving tractor. Only a split-second reaction can save you from a collision.

Each year, Iowa farmers move nearly two billion bushels of grain and millions of livestock from production to market, much of it on the county and state highway system. Because all Iowans share the same roads, it helps to know what to look for. This brochure reviews three common ways that farm vehicles are involved in traffic collisions. Defensive driving tips are given for each situation.

At least half of all deaths from unintentional injuries are caused by motor vehicles. According to the National Safety Council, this represented 42,000 deaths in 1993; two out of three deaths were in rural locations. A study of Iowa traffic reports between 1988 and 1992 showed 1,333 reports involved agricultural vehicles, almost one collision every day on Iowa roads. Information in this brochure is based on that study conducted at Iowa State University.

Left-turn collision

The scenario: The left-turn collision is the most common type of farm vehicle incident on public roads. It happens when the farm vehicle is about to make a left turn; meanwhile, the motorist behind the farm vehicle decides to pass. The study showed 297 such reports in five years (22 percent of all farm vehicle collisions).



Why it happens: Like semi-truck drivers, operators of large farm vehicles, such as combines or tractor-wagon combinations, sometimes make wide left turns. Farm operators may swing to the right before making a left turn because they need the extra room to line up with a farm gate or driveway. This can be confusing, especially if you think the farm operator is moving over to let you pass.

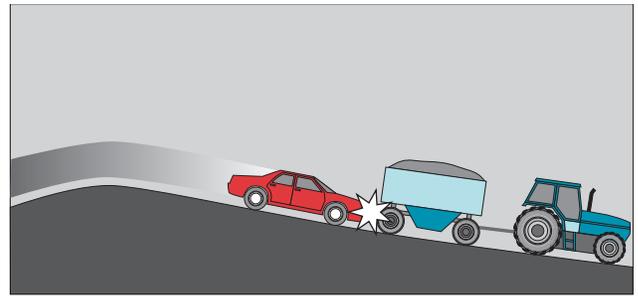
Defensive driving tips:

- ▲ **Is it really turning?** Don't assume a farm vehicle that pulls to the right side of the road is going to turn right, or is letting you pass. Check the operator's hand signals.
- ▲ **Is there a turn signal?** A flashing light on a tractor that suddenly stops flashing is a turn signal. Slow down when you see this signal.
- ▲ **Where could it turn?** Check the left side of the road for gates, driveways, or any place a farm vehicle might turn.

Rear-end collision

The scenario: The rear-end collision is the second most common type of farm vehicle incident on public roads. The study showed 247 such reports in five years (20 percent of all farm vehicle collisions).

Why it happens: It's easy to misjudge speed when you come upon a slow-moving vehicle. In most



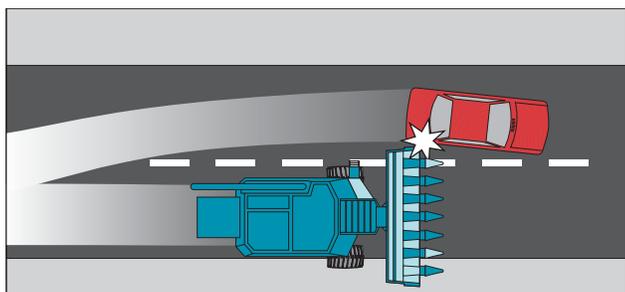
cases, you have only a few seconds to react and slow down. For example, if you're driving 55 miles an hour and come upon a tractor that's moving 15 miles an hour, it only takes five seconds to close a gap the length of a football field between you and the tractor.

Defensive driving tips:

- ▲ **Be alert.** Always watch for farm vehicles on rural roads, especially at planting and harvest.
- ▲ **Slow down immediately.** As soon as you see a slow-moving vehicle, start to apply brakes like you would when approaching a stoplight.
- ▲ **Keep your distance.** Stay a safe distance behind farm vehicles. Most farm equipment is not designed to travel at speeds greater than 25 miles an hour. Even when towed behind a truck, equipment such as sprayers and fuel tanks often travels less than 25 miles an hour.

Passing collision

The scenario: Many collisions also occur when motorists pass farm vehicles. The study showed 51 such reports in five years (4 percent of all farm vehicle collisions).



Why it happens: Some farm operators haul equipment that is extra wide or long, which motorists don't consider when they plan to pass. Many people assume that collisions happen during bad weather or hazardous conditions. The study showed nearly 80 percent of the collisions happened on dry roads.

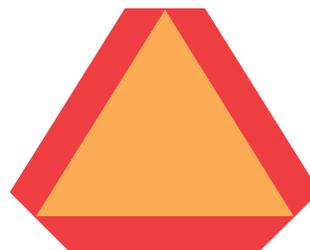
Defensive driving tips:

- ▲ **Be patient.** Don't assume the farmer can move aside to let you pass. Shoulders may be soft, wet, or steep, which can cause the farm vehicle to tip, or they may not be able to support a heavy farm vehicle.
- ▲ **Make sure you're clear.** When passing, make sure you can see the farm vehicle in your rear-view mirror before you get back in your lane.
- ▲ **Enjoy the drive.** Even if you have to slow down to 20 miles an hour and follow a tractor for two miles, it takes only six minutes of your time, about the same as waiting for two stoplights.

Sharing Iowa Roads with Farm Vehicles

Iowa roads can be used safely by everyone. To help you enjoy your time on Iowa roads or make your work commute safer, remember these tips.

- ▲ Many collisions with farm vehicles happen during fall harvest. October has nearly twice as many collisions as any other month.
- ▲ The most common time of day for collisions to occur is between 4 and 8 p.m. This may be due to the large number of commuters coming home from work, plus farm operators returning from fields.



- ▲ Recognize this sign. It means slow down because the vehicle is traveling less than 35 miles an hour. SMV emblems are fluorescent orange outlined in red. You should be able to see them at least 500 feet away.
- ▲ Stay back at least 50 feet when following farm equipment.

Prepared by Charles Schwab, extension safety specialist, and Laura Miller, former extension communications specialist, with design by Tom Hiett.



File: Safety 2-2 and 2-4

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