

News Article

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Be Safe – Every Farmer Counts

We'll all soon be faced with large farm equipment traveling local roads for fall harvest operations. As a driver, it is easy to get frustrated when caught behind something going less than 25 miles per hour, but please take a breath and be patient. Your life counts, and every farmer's life counts.

National Farm Safety and Health Week is September 20-26, according to the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) www.necasag.org. The theme for 2020 is "Every Farmer Counts".

The 2018 data for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that the agricultural sector is still the most dangerous in America with 574 fatalities, or an equivalent of 23.4 deaths per 100,000 workers. Fall harvest time can be one of the busiest and most dangerous seasons of the year for the agriculture industry. For this reason, the third week of September has been recognized as National Farm Safety and Health Week.

According to the NECAS website, "The theme is to acknowledge, celebrate, and uplift America's farmers and ranchers who have encountered many challenges over the past couple of years, yet continue to work hard to provide the food, fiber, and fuel that we need."

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are about 3.4 million agricultural producers in America, which is only about one percent of our population. In Indiana, the census indicates we have 95,845 ag producers, two-thirds of which are male, and one-third are female. In Whitley County, the census indicates we have 912 ag producers, nearly three-quarters of which are male, and over one-quarter are female. "These farmers and ranchers not only provide the essentials that we need, but they do wonderful things for their families and friends, their communities, and beyond," said NECAS.

"There is a shared responsibility for making sure our roadways remain safe," said Bill Field, Purdue Extension farm safety expert. "There are certain times of the year when farm vehicles will be more prevalent, such as spring planting and fall harvest, and motorists need to recognize that and exercise patience."

Field said modern farm vehicles have more safety equipment than previous models, including better lighting, but the individual vehicles are much larger and pose a greater danger in a collision. Tractors, planters, sprayers and other farm equipment can be two to three times the height of passenger vehicles, weigh up to 40,000 pounds, and take up more than a lane of traffic.

Drivers should keep in mind that farmers cannot always safely pull over to let others pass, due to road signs, side ditches, the physical nature of what they are transporting, and other hazards. Conversely, farmers should be courteous and pull over to let others pass when it is safe to do so. Trucks and other grain hauling equipment may have to be parked temporarily on county roads, and extra care should be taken when passing these areas.

One thing that every new Indiana driver learns about in their driver's manual is the meaning of Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblems displayed on farm equipment and other vehicles. An SMV emblem is a triangle shape, with an orange fluorescent center and red reflective borders. Equipment and other vehicles displaying this emblem are capable of speeds no faster than 25 miles per hour.

This becomes very important, in fact, a matter of life and death, as it refers to our Amish neighbors in northern Indiana transporting people in horse-drawn buggies and other slow-moving vehicles year-round. Please slow down and drive safely!

Farmers should recheck the condition of SMV emblems to make sure they are still fluorescent. Other road-related safety equipment, such as headlights, taillights, flashing lights, hitch pins, tires, and wheel bearings also should be checked.

Safety is always an important consideration, whether at home, on the road, or on the farm. Your life counts, and every farmer's life counts.