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Oregon Farm Bureau offers video, brochure on how to share the road safely with farm equipment

July 3, 2018, SALEM, OREGON: For many Oregon farmers, July 4 signifies the busiest time of year. Harvest of major crops like grass seed, berries, clover, and wheat is in full swing, and it's not unusual for a farmer to spend 15-hour days working in the field.

Summer harvest also means that sometimes farmers must drive their equipment, such as tractors, swathers, combines, and trucks, out on public roads to move between fields.

Driving a slow-moving tractor on a highway is legal and often a necessary part of harvest — but it can pose a safety risk without caution, courtesy, and patience.

To help keep both motorists and farmers safe, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) Health & Safety Committee offers a new one-minute video and a free brochure with important tips on how to share the road safely with farm equipment.

- See the video on OFB’s Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/ofbinfo
- See the video on OFB’s YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/OregonFarmBureau
- See the OFB brochure: https://oregonfb.org/safety/

“We're reminding drivers to slow down, be patient, and use caution when encountering a tractor on the road,” said Anne Rigor of Benton County Farm Bureau.

“It's heartbreaking to hear about injuries or deaths involving tractors that could've been avoided if drivers had simply slowed down, or farmers had taken a few simple steps,” said Rigor.

Farmers do their best to avoid moving equipment during high-traffic times, but during peak harvest, when the fruit is ripe or the hay is at the optimum level of dryness, they have no choice.

Most farm equipment is designed to travel at speeds of no more than 25 miles per hour (mph),
and must display a reflective, triangular, orange-and-red, slow-moving-vehicle sign if going out on public roads.

It can be surprising just how slow 25 mph is on the highway. A tractor that looks far on the horizon can be directly in front of a fast-moving car within seconds.

“If you’re driving 55 mph on a highway and come upon a tractor that’s moving at only 25 mph, it can take only 8 seconds to close a gap the length of a football field. You’ll be right behind that heavy piece of equipment very quickly,” said Rigor.

In 2015, there were 54 traffic accidents involving farm equipment, resulting in 30 serious injuries and one death, according to the Oregon Dept. of Transportation. In 2014, there were 40 accidents with 34 injuries and three deaths.

The OFB Health & Safety Committee is also working with County Farm Bureaus throughout the Willamette Valley on a series of radio ads promoting rural road safety, which will air during summer harvest.

Safety tips for motorists include:

- If you decide to pass farm equipment on the road, please do so with caution.
- Be watchful of vehicles behind you that may also try to pass.
- If you must enter the oncoming lane of traffic, do not proceed unless you can see clearly ahead of both your vehicle and the vehicle you will pass.
- If there are any curves or hills ahead that may block your view or the view of oncoming vehicles, do not pass.
- Do not pass if you are in a designated “No Passing Zone” or within 100 feet of any intersection, railroad grade crossing, bridge, elevation structure, or tunnel.
- Do not assume that a farm vehicle that pulls to the right side of the road is going to turn right or is letting you pass. Due to the size of some farm implements, the farmer must make wide left-hand turns. If you are unsure, check the operator’s hand signals and look at the left side of the road for gates, driveways, or a place the vehicle might turn.

Safety tips for farmers include:

- Oregon law requires a slow-moving vehicle reflector on any machine that travels the road slower than 25 mph. Always point the triangle up, keep the SMV emblem clean to maximize reflectivity, and replace the emblem when it fades, normally every two to three years.
- Mark the edges of tractors and machines with reflective tape and reflectors. Consider installing retrofit lighting on older machinery to increase visibility.
- Turn on your lights, but turn off rear spotlights when going onto the road. From a distance spotlights can be mistaken for headlights.
- Be aware of heavy traffic patterns.
- Consider installing mirrors on equipment so you can see motorists around you. Be careful where the mirrors are placed.
- When moving multiple farm implements down the highway, leave enough space between each vehicle for cars to pass.
Request free copies of the OFB Rural Road Safety Brochure by contacting annemarie@oregonfb.org or 503.399.1701.

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* Note to Editors: “Farm Bureau” is a registered trademark; please capitalize in all cases.

Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit, general farm organization representing the interests of farming and ranching families in the public and policymaking arenas. First established at the county level in 1919 and the state level in 1932, Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 counties and has nearly 7,000 farm and ranch family members.

Oregon Farm Bureau President Barry Bushue is a third-generation farmer raising pumpkins, u-pick produce, and flowering baskets at a nearly century-old farm near Boring. He is OFB’s 15th president.