

Share The Road With Agricultural Equipment

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Wheat harvest has started in southern Kansas and it will be rolling through our area before long. While we do not raise the amount of wheat we once did, it is still a crucial time of the year and you are liable to encounter large equipment and trucks loaded with wheat on the roadways. That alone tends to cause a level of frustration in many drivers. Now let's add to that mix a plethora of road construction. That's the second straw and that is about as many straws as some drivers seem to be able to handle.

Because of the weather, wheat harvest may easily be spread over the next two weeks or longer. What that means is that all of us driving our normal vehicles on the roadways need to be extra vigilant, extra cautious and extra patient. We don't need to have the agricultural producers driving those vehicles put at risk and we don't need your or me put at risk because of someone's impatience.

The most important thing that everyone needs to keep in mind is that all of that farm equipment that we encounter on the roadway has as much right to be there as we do in our cars, pickup trucks, SUVs and motorcycles. There are a whole group of statutes that address farm equipment and how they must operate and how other drivers need to operate around them.

The second thing you need to remember is that a lot of this equipment is BIG, it's heavy and it does not maneuver the same way as our personal vehicles do. It accelerates more slowly, it takes longer and requires more room to turn corners and it takes much longer to stop. If you are in an unfortunate accident with a piece of farm equipment, keep in mind that it is much heavier and larger and your vehicle will probably come out the loser.

If you are following a piece of agricultural equipment down the road, at say, 20 mph, you do have the right to pass it, when it is safe to do so. If you are in a marked no passing zone it is not safe to pass and you are breaking the law if you do. Statutes do require slow moving farm equipment to move over and let traffic around IF there are more than three vehicles behind it and WHEN it is safe to do so. If they are on a road with no shoulders and no place, like an intersection, to pull over, it doesn't matter if there are 20 vehicles behind it, you're just going to stay behind it.

When approaching equipment from the rear you need to be aware that they may be making a left turn into a location where you and I may not. You need to be alert not only to road intersections, but for the existence of field entrances as well. All of the newer farm equipment vehicles do have turn signals, but older equipment may not. You need to be alert for hand signals! Even if they are making a right turn, there's a good chance they'll have to swing out into the left lane to negotiate that turn. If you are trying to pass, you could get squeezed off the road.

The bottom line here is safety. You may just need to plan on leaving for work a few minutes earlier, just in case. If you encounter ag equipment on the road, slow down well in advance because with their slower speed, you will catch up to it quicker than a normal vehicle. Leave them a wide berth to allow them room to operate. If you are approaching an intersection with a piece of equipment turning your way, slow down and give them room to make the turn, don't crowd the intersection.

Harvest time is a busy time with lots of big equipment out and about. It's a stressful time for everyone. It's pay day for the farmer as they bring in the wheat that provides the bread for our tables. Everyone needs to have PATIENCE for the next few weeks so we can get through the 2016 wheat harvest safely and effeciently!