



## **On Farm Equipment and Highway Safety**

**February 9, 2012**

Many of us find it inconvenient to be motoring down the road only to come up behind a tractor, cattle trailer, or other piece of farm equipment that is travelling at a rate of speed more comparable to a golf cart than an automobile. We would much rather that slow-poke farmer just move off the road and let us go along our merry way. However I would like to urge caution and patience in order to ensure the safety of both you and the farmer. I would also like to share a personal story that hopefully helps emphasize the importance of respecting farm machinery on the highway.

In 1994, my father was farming in Terrell County but also rented a farm in neighboring Sumter County. In order to travel to that farm, he had to cross over the Kinchafoonee Creek and the two-lane bridge that spanned it. On July 7<sup>th</sup>, he was returning home driving a tractor with an attached harrow. His fear was always one that many farmers can probably relate to; the tractor and harrow took up both lanes of the bridge and left no room for the tractor to move or for oncoming traffic to cross. A tractor-trailer came towards the bridge travelling too fast to stop before coming to the bridge, causing the driver to hit both the bridge and my dad's tractor as his truck went sailing over the bridge into the creek below. Miraculously, no one was seriously injured on that day, but both my dad and that truck driver could have easily been another sad statistic related to farm-highway accidents.

In 2010, there were 300 crashes involving passenger vehicles and farm equipment in Georgia. Of these 300 accidents, 5 resulted in fatalities. Also, of the total 1,249 traffic-related deaths on Georgia roads in 2010, 30 percent occurred on rural roads. If you compare this to the 19% of deaths that occurred in the metro-Atlanta area, you start to realize the importance of caution when riding on our country roads.

Here are a few tips for both motorists and farmers to help keep everyone safe on our roads:

### **For motorists:**

- Be watchful of vehicles behind you that may also try to pass.
- If you must enter the oncoming lane of traffic, do not pass unless you can see clearly ahead of both you 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 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 execute wide left turns. If you are unsure, check the operator's hand signals and check the left side of the road for driveways or any place a farm vehicle must turn.

### **For farmers:**

- Georgia law requires you to place a slow moving vehicle reflector on any machine that travels the road slower than 25 MPH. Always point the triangle up, keep the emblem clean to maximize reflectivity and replace the emblem when it fades, normally every 2 to 3 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 light, but turn off spotlights when going onto the road.
- Avoid the highway during rush hour and bad weather. Do not drive before sunrise or after sunset.
- Consider installing mirrors on equipment to enable you to be more aware of motorists around you.

We enjoy living in a rural county, but there are some certain "rules for the road" associated with country life, and respecting a farm vehicle on the highway is one of them. For everyone involved, safety should always be the most important thing to keep in mind.