

Law Bulletin



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Law you need to know from OSU Extension's Farm Office

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Rules of the Road: Navigating Ohio Roadway Laws for Farm Machinery

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How does Ohio law define farm machinery?

The Ohio Revised Code (O.R.C.) has several definitions for different types of farm implements:

- An "agricultural tractor" is a self-propelled vehicle that can pull other vehicles, but typically does not carry loads of commodities on its own.
- A "farm truck" is defined as a truck that is used to move farm commodities.
- A "multi-wheel agricultural tractor" is a tractor with at least two wheels on either side of a rear axle.
- "Farm machinery" includes all machines and tools that are used in agriculture. This definition includes anything used to plant, harvest, and transport agricultural products. Therefore, "farm machinery" encompasses all the other separate definitions for farm implements.

What are the marking requirements for farm machinery traveling on roads?

Signs

- Farm machinery that moves at a speed of 25 mph or less must have a slow moving vehicle (SMV) emblem.
- Farm machinery that can run at speeds above 25 mph must also display a speed identification symbol (SIS) in addition to the SMV. The SIS must follow the requirements put forth by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. Additionally, the operator of the machinery must carry proof of the maximum speed supplied by the manufacturer.

Lighting

- From sunset to sunrise, in conditions of low visibility, or when there is precipitation, multi-wheeled agricultural tractors model year 2001 or earlier must have reflectors and illuminated amber lamps. The lamps must show the extreme right and left of the tractor. Amber reflectors must be observable in the front of the tractor, and red reflectors must be observable in the rear.
- From sunset to sunrise, in conditions of low visibility, or when there is precipitation, farm machinery model year 2002 or later must follow the standard from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers ANSI/ASAE S279.11 APR01 or any of its revisions as pertains to lighting.

How do vehicle weight rules apply to farm equipment, machinery, and trucks?

There are special rules and exceptions to roadway weight limits for farm trucks and farm machinery. Farm trucks or machinery carrying farm commodities such as livestock, bulk milk, corn, soybeans, tobacco, and wheat are allowed to surpass the general weight limits by 7.5%. This exception is not applicable in February or March, or on interstate highways or highways, roads, or bridges that have reduced maximum weights.

The general weight limits for vehicles on roadways other than farm vehicles depend on a number of factors, including the width of the tires, the materials the tires are made out of, whether tires are pneumatic or solid, the number of axles, the type of axles, and the space between axles. Overall, the gross weight of a vehicle with pneumatic tires cannot be greater than 80,000 pounds. For a vehicle with solid tires, the overall weight cannot be greater than 80% of the weight allowed for a pneumatic-tired vehicle.

There is also an exception for vehicles carrying manure, turf, sod, silage, chips, sawdust, mulch, bark, pulpwood, biomass, or firewood from the point of production. Such vehicles are able to surpass the general weight limits by 7.5%. There is no time of year restriction for vehicles hauling the aforementioned commodities, but they still may not operate on interstate highways or areas with reduced maximum weights.

What dimension limits apply to farm machinery?

Farm machinery and farm equipment that is being driven or is self-propelled is generally exempt from the width, length, and height limitations in Ohio law. Those laws state that vehicles are not allowed to exceed 102 inches in width, 50 feet in length, or 13 feet, six inches in height and that a commercial tractor-semitrailer combination cannot exceed 53 feet in length.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has a policy that interprets this farm machinery exemption. According to ODOT, farm machinery and equipment that is self-propelled or towed falls under the dimension exemption. Farm machinery that is hauled or transported is not exempt from dimension limits.

The Ohio Supreme Court determined that if the right half of a roadway is not of a sufficient width to accommodate farm machinery or equipment, the operator of the farm machinery or equipment is exempt from Ohio's law prohibiting operating a vehicle left of the center line. *State v. Leichty*, 68 Ohio St.3d 37 (1993).

What limits are there on the movement of farm machinery?

Traffic control devices

Traffic control devices can limit the movement of farm machinery and equipment. Traffic control devices include official signs, signals, flaggers, or markings on or near the roadway, such as a sign that prohibits farm machinery on a certain stretch of road. An operator of farm equipment or machinery must obey a traffic control device unless a police officer directs the operator otherwise. Traffic control devices can also change weight and dimension requirements on a roadway, and take precedent over the weight exceptions and the dimension exemptions for farm machinery explained above.

Operation on freeways

Agricultural tractors and farm machinery are not allowed on a freeway unless otherwise directed by a police officer. A freeway is a multi-lane highway that is separated down the middle and has a limited number of places to enter and exit the road, and all roads that cross the highway are located at different grades.

Are there options to move farm machinery despite legal limitations?

Yes, there are options available to farmers who need to move farm machinery over freeways or in violation of dimension limitations, and traffic control devices. An operator may apply for a farm equipment permit or a single trip permit that would authorize the movement of the machinery and equipment. To do so, an operator must submit a number of forms and provide proof of insurance to ODOT. If ODOT grants a permit request, an operator might also have to comply with Ohio State Highway Patrol escort requirements. Further information and instructions for special hauling permits are available on ODOT's website.

Laws, regulations, and policies to know:

- Motor vehicles definitions: O.R.C. § 4501.01.
- Operation of motor vehicles definitions: O.R.C. § 4511.01.
- Freeways –prohibited acts: O.R.C. § 4511.051.
- Animal-drawn or slow-moving vehicles: O.R.C. § 4513.11.
- Requirements for multi-wheel agricultural tractors and farm machinery units: O.R.C. § 4513.111.
- Load Limits on Highways: O.R.C. Chapter 5577.
- Movement of Overweight and Overdimension Vehicles: Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 5501:2-1.
- Exemption-- Farm Machinery and Equipment, ODOT: <https://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Operations/Maintenance/Permits/Documents/FarmEqRule.pdf>.
- Special Hauling Permits Section, ODOT: <http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Operations/Maintenance/Permits/Pages/default.aspx>.

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