

Law Bulletin



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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There are many traffic signs on Ohio's roadways, but are you aware of the different rules of the road that apply to farm machinery? Ohio law contains special provisions for marking, weight limits, dimension limits, and movement of farm machinery on roadways.

How does Ohio law define farm machinery?

The Ohio Revised Code has several definitions for different types of farm vehicles and machinery:

- 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 a truck 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" means all machines and tools that are used in agriculture, including anything used to plant, harvest, and transport agricultural products. Thus, "farm machinery" encompasses all other types and definitions of farm implements.

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

1. Sign requirements

- "Farm machinery" moving at a speed of 25 mph or less must display a slow moving vehicle (SMV) emblem on the rear of the machinery.
- "Farm machinery" that can run at speeds above 25 mph must display a speed identification symbol (SIS) in addition to the SMV and the operator of the machinery must carry proof of the maximum speed as stated by the manufacturer.

2. Lighting requirements

- 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 machinery?

There are special rules and exceptions to roadway weight limits for "farm trucks" and "farm machinery." "Farm trucks" or "farm 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 these commodities, but they may not be operated on interstate highways or areas with reduced maximum weights.

What dimension limits apply to farm machinery?

"Farm machinery" and "farm equipment" that is driven or self-propelled is exempt from the vehicle 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 and a half feet 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" that is self-propelled or towed falls under the exemption, but "farm machinery" that is hauled or transported is not exempt from dimension limits.

Regarding width limits on roadways, the Ohio Supreme Court has determined that if the right half of a roadway is not of a sufficient width to accommodate "farm machinery," the operator of the "farm machinery" is exempt from Ohio's law that prohibits 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?

1. Traffic control devices

An operator of "farm machinery" must obey a traffic control device unless a police officer directs the operator otherwise. 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.

Where traffic control devices change the weight and dimension requirements on a roadway, the changes take precedent over the weight and dimension exemptions for "farm machinery" explained above.

2. 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. 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.

Where to find Ohio laws

Find the Ohio Revised Code online at <http://codes.ohio.gov>:

- Farm vehicle and machinery 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 over dimension 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/FarmEqtRule.pdf>.
- Special Hauling Permits Section, ODOT: <http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Operations/Maintenance/Permits/Pages/default.aspx>.

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