

Study to make public roads safer for farmers, drivers

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Population growth and significant increases in development across the country are leading to changes in traffic and driving behavior in many areas where motorists share the road with farmers moving their equipment – changes that worry some members of the agriculture community. Now researchers from North Carolina State University have found a number of risk factors associated with traffic accidents involving farm vehicles, which could point the way toward changes that will better protect farmers and motorists.

Crashes involving farm vehicles on public roads are infrequent (they make up less than 1 percent of accidents in North Carolina), but they are a significant concern for farmers. In fact, a crash on a public road involving farm equipment is five times more likely to result in a fatality than other types of motor vehicle accidents. In an attempt to better understand what circumstances might contribute to farm vehicle crashes, NC State researchers looked at data from North Carolina farms to identify common risk factors.

Study co-author Dr. Michael D. Schulman, William Neal Reynolds Professor of Sociology at NC State, explains that the study identified five factors associated with farms that had increased odds of being in a farm vehicle crash on a public road. For example, Schulman says, size matters in farm vehicle crashes – a farm's odds of being involved in an accident on public roads increases as the size of the transported farm equipment increases.

Other factors included a farm's using young farm vehicle drivers; using non-family hired help as drivers; a history of farm injuries; and use of non-English speaking farm vehicle drivers. However, Schulman stresses that – while the study found that farms using hired help and non-English speaking workers were more likely to have crashes – limitations in the available data prevented the researchers from determining whether the non-English speaking workers or hired help were

themselves involved in farm vehicle crashes.

Schulman says the study finds that "a multifaceted approach that goes beyond the farmer" is needed to improve farm vehicle safety on public roads. The study suggests that future research should ascertain whether farm vehicle driver licensing, training, testing and monitoring would reduce the risk of farm vehicle crashes. And, Schulman notes, farmers themselves have suggested the creation of slow-moving vehicle lanes and better speed-limit enforcement.

Source: North Carolina State University

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