



Staying Safe on Iowa's Rural Roads

Statewide partnerships address the dangers of rural crashes.

Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), based at the University of Iowa, is a consortium of the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and the Iowa Department of Public Health. We have a network of active producers who provide input as to their safety concerns and guidance on activities to achieve our mission to help keep farmers alive and well in Iowa.

Rural roadway safety is one of the most common safety concerns we hear from them. They often recount stories of near misses while they're on the road with a tractor, combine or utility ATV. They fear that car drivers do not understand how to drive safely with farm implements on the road. Car operators often approach from the rear too fast or pass on hills and cross solid painted lines. They do not anticipate when a tractor or combine might turn into a field or driveway, or even more risky, to the left.

According to the Iowa Department of Transportation statistics, between 2004 and 2013, there were 1,947 crashes between farm equipment and farm vehicles, resulting in 1,076 injuries and 72 deaths. Rural roads are especially risky for the teenage drivers of our producers. Forty percent of all Iowa teen fatalities are a result of car crashes and teen drivers are of much higher risk of crashes on rural roads compared to the general population.

Looking ahead, it is unlikely that statistics will improve without some cooperation among all who share Iowa's rural roads. Farm machinery is getting larger, taking up more of the roadway. Individual producers are farming more land, requiring them to travel further from field to field meaning more time on the road. Increasing acreage in corn can lead to corn being planted close to intersection, blocking cross-traffic vision prior to harvest. In addition, more non-farm people are visiting and moving to rural areas; they are often unaccustomed to sharing the road with farm equipment. Rural roadways are not always in the best of condition, creating additional risks of crashes.

I-CASH has listened to producers and developed a program to try and reduce these roadway risks. We have been working with our I-CASH partners, the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, the Department of Transportation, and the Highway Patrol to attack this problem on several fronts. We have developed a video on rural roadway safety that has been an important educational tool. The video, "Rural Road Crashes- They're Preventable" has been widely distributed across the state, including drivers license stations, county sheriff's offices, Extension offices, and driver education instructors.

You might have guessed that operator of the motor vehicle is at higher risk for serious injury in a crash involving farm equipment. Statistics also show that the motor vehicle

operator is more often the one “at fault” in the crash. I-CASH has again partnered with the Governor’s Safety Bureau to post billboards around the state. These remind drivers on rural roads to “Prevent Crashes on Rural Roads: Be Patient. Slow Down. Buckle Up.” For anyone driving on rural roads during the harvest season, it is important to be prepared to slow down for farmers on the road. They produce our food; let’s give them the space they need to do their jobs! We also encourage all producers to follow the law and make sure that any equipment they operate on the roads has a visible, reflective Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem and working lights.

Both automobile and farm equipment operators have a responsibility to ensure safe sharing of the road. To help convey this information, we have prepared a rural roadways safety tips card to help point out both the car drivers’ and the equipment operators’ responsibilities. I encourage you to distribute these materials to your families, friends, farm groups, church, neighbors or anywhere you feel that producers will read and pay attention.

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