

VEHICLE CODE DOES NOT FULLY ACCOMMODATE TODAY'S AGRICULTURE

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Although numerous changes have been made to the Vehicle Code during its 25-year history in order to keep the Code responsive to farmers' needs, several areas do not adequately reflect today's agricultural practices. That message was obvious when a group of Lancaster County farmers and persons performing custom farm services on farms met with state legislators and other state officials in March of last year.

These farmers and custom operators pointed out many areas where the Vehicle Code allowances for ag vehicles are incompatible with modern farming practices. The Code's width allowances for farm machinery are substantially below the width of machinery that many farmers are purchasing and using today on their farms. The Vehicle Code provides little real opportunity for farmers to use their vehicles at night, making farmers constantly vulnerable to law enforcement actions. The Code's absolute prohibition of any material to escape from trucks and trailers imposes unreasonable obstacles on the ability of farmers fully complying with the prohibition to harvest farm products in a timely manner. The restrictive width and weight allowances for "multipurpose agricultural vehicles" discouraged farmers from taking advantage of more versatile ATV models that perform a multitude of important work tasks around the farm. And confusing and unreasonable interpretations of the Code with respect to the use of farm machinery by custom operators and their drivers on roads has seriously hurt farmers' ability to obtain needed custom farm services on their farms.

In response to these increasing concerns, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and other agriculture and agribusiness organizations have spearheaded a coordinated lobbying effort to obtain changes in the Vehicle Code that will provide allowances for use of farm machinery and other vehicles that better reflect today's agricultural needs.

Before adjournment last fall, the lobbying effort of agriculture and agribusiness resulted in enactment of several helpful changes to the Vehicle Code. The maximum width and weight allowances for vehicles qualifying as "multipurpose agricultural vehicles" were increased from 50 to 60 inches in width and from 700 to 1200 pounds in dry weight. The General Assembly also increased the maximum width allowance for a trailer or vehicle carrying forage or farm produce during daylight hours from 10 to 11 feet.

Many other problems with the Vehicle Code remain. Farm and agribusiness groups will be seeking amendments to the Vehicle Code that will:

- Increase the maximum width allowance for farm machinery to be legally operated during daylight hours from 14½ feet to 16 feet (with requirements for additional equipment on machinery between 14½ feet and 16 feet to enhance visibility to other traffic).

- Allow farm machinery greater than 8 feet in width that are equipped with additional lighting and marking for visibility to other traffic to be legally operated on roadways at night.
- Exempt farm vehicles and implements of husbandry transporting farm products within a 25 mile radius of the farm from the Vehicle Code's stringent requirement for "securing loads" if the speed of the vehicle is 45 miles per hour or less.
- Provide for farm machinery and the drivers of farm machinery operated on roads in performing custom farm services for farms the same classifications, allowances and exemptions as the machinery owned and used by the farmer for his own farm. Farm machinery used by custom operators in providing custom services to farms should be exempt from registration, and should be given the same width allowances as are provided to machinery owned and used by the farmer on his own farm. The Vehicle Code should specifically exclude farm machinery used in providing custom farm services from the definition of "commercial vehicles" and should ensure that drivers of these vehicles are not required to obtain a commercial driver's license in order to operate the vehicle.
- Limit the penalty that may be imposed on a farmer who does not fully comply the restrictions in use of farm registered or farm exempt vehicles to misuse of a farm vehicle under Section 1344 (a maximum fine of \$200), and prohibit authority to assess any penalty under Section 1301 for operating a vehicle without a valid vehicle registration (a fine of double the registration fee that would apply to the vehicle if registered under commercial registration plates).