

Stay legal on the road this fall

By HOLLY SPANGLER

AS this fall's expected harvest ripens in the field, farmers across Illinois will spend much of the month of August readying combines, grain bins, wagons and semis. But will all that equipment be legal on the road? According to the Illinois State Police,

Key Points

- Many trucking laws apply to farmers, especially those farmers with semis.
- Those who are out of compliance could face liability.
- Check with State Police to verify what type of license you need.

NO EXCEPTIONS: "We hear, 'I can't afford to do all this,'" says Lance Bonney. "But plenty of farmers already are."

this may be a good time to make sure it is. Illinois State Trooper Lance Bonney conducts up to 500 truck inspections every year, and teaches units on size and weight restrictions at the Illinois Police



Academy. Yet every year, he runs into farmers who think certain laws don't apply to them — in some cases, rightly so, and in others, not so much.

"Farmers will say, 'Well, I'm just a farmer.' But that doesn't mean you're exempt from everything," Bonney says. "Your loaded truck is capable of doing the same damage as an over-the-road semi from California."

Bonney does allow that some laws can be confusing, and certain agricultural vehicles are exempt from certain laws. Here, Bonney and his colleague, Trooper Todd Teel, run through what you need to know to move your trucks and wagons legally — and safely — down the road.

Proper driver's license

Who needs a CDL, or commercial driver's license? Not most farmers, says Bonney, unless they are paid to haul loads for someone else. However, farmers do need a Class A driver's license if they plan to drive combination vehicles of more than 26,000 pounds — for example, a semi and hopper trailer, or a pickup and well-loaded livestock trailer.

Drivers of straight trucks weighing more than 26,000 pounds need a B license. Drivers of straight trucks weighing less than 26,000 pounds need a Class C license. Class D licenses are reserved for drivers of regular automobiles. In addition, 16-year-olds are eligible to receive Class A licenses, Bonney adds.

And a parting piece of advice from Bonney: Don't rely on driver's license office personnel to accurately answer licensing questions. They are not trained in enforcing federal motor carrier safety regulations and may not be able to accurately answer your questions. Direct those questions to your local Illinois State Police district office.

Current medical card

In many cases, farmers and their employees do not need to carry a medical card, Bonney reports. However, they do need one if they will be driving a combination vehicle — such as a semi and trailer, or a ton pickup pulling a goose-neck livestock or grain trailer.

And while a medical card may seem like a trivial detail, Todd Teel says civil liability requires that you pay attention.

"If anything happens and you're sued, and if you have something incorrect like no medical card or the wrong license, they've got you," Teel describes. "If it's your employee and they have the wrong license, you are the owner of the company and you just gained all that liability. You could lose the farm."

To obtain a medical card, you'll need a physical and a signature from your doctor. For a "trucker's physical" form, go to www.usdot.gov.

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