

Be Seen and Be Safe Highway Safety with Farm Equipment Program

Norman Harrell

Ted Keen, a farmer from Wilson County, lost his life when a tractor trailer truck traveling 70 miles per hour rear-ended his tractor in the spring of 2003. This incident was the catalyst for addressing the issue of highway safety with farm equipment. Research data also indicated that this was a need for farmers in Wilson and the surrounding counties. The University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center reported that there were approximately 1,500 farm vehicle crashes in North Carolina from 1995 through 1999 [1]. Six counties in the 7-county area comprising Wilson, Nash, Edgecombe, Pitt, Wayne, Greene, and Johnston were among the top 12 counties in North Carolina in farm vehicle crashes during this period. In this 7-county area, there has been a 20.4% increase in population during the last decade. This has led to more motorists on the highways who are less familiar with agricultural equipment. In addition to the increase in population, farm operations have increased in size by 18%, requiring farmers with agricultural machinery to travel greater distances on highways, with larger, less maneuverable equipment. Under these conditions, farmers must implement safety practices that protect themselves and their employees.

To address this situation, in 2004, Cooperative Extension conducted the Be Seen and Be Safe Highway Safety with Farm Equipment program and collaborated with the North Carolina Highway Patrol to offer educational training for farmers and their employees on highway safety with farm equipment. Extension agents received a grant from the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission to fund this project.

The objectives of the Be Seen and Be Safe project were to (1) decrease the number of agricultural machinery highway crashes, through farmer education and public awareness, and (2) to increase farmer adoption of safety practices with agricultural machinery on highways.

Farmers need to be proactive in highway safety by increasing visibility of farm machinery on the highway. Taking actions that make agricultural machinery more visible will help motorists to see slow moving vehicles earlier. Extension agents researched and developed a presentation that advocated highway safety and encouraged farmers to be proactive. Sergeant Tom Futrell of the North Carolina Highway Patrol presented information on laws pertaining to farm machinery on highways. Agents developed and distributed a brochure that served as a reference and safety reminder for participants after the meeting. Farmers who attended the safety meetings received a safety kit that included items to increase their visibility on the highways, thus being seen and being safe. These items included a strobe light, a "Slow Moving Vehicle" sign, and 3 FARM (Fewer Accidents with Reflective Material) Saf Kits. More than 1,000 farmers and farmworkers participated in these educational meetings.

Because of the large number of Spanish-speaking em-

ployees who operate farm equipment on highways, farmers asked the extension agents to conduct a Spanish version of the training. Agents used volunteers to translate the presentation, script, and safety brochure into Spanish. This training has been conducted numerous times during multiple years, in an effort to reach Spanish-speaking employees.

At the meetings in each county, participants took a pre- and posttest, to determine knowledge gained from the presentations. In the 7-county area, farmers increased their knowledge by an average of 71%. Three months after the meetings, extension agents mailed all program participants an evaluation survey. Results indicated that 94% of respondents had installed the new slow moving vehicle signs on their farm equipment, 82% had marked farm equipment with reflective tape, 67% had installed the safety strobe light, 49% had purchased additional slow moving vehicle signs, and 92% had shared highway safety information with their employees.

In 2004, the North Carolina Highway Patrol reported 39 crashes involving farm equipment in the project service area. This represented a 21.7% decrease in crashes, compared with an average of 49.8 crashes per year involving farm equipment, as reported by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, from 1995 to 1999 for the area.

Farmers responded to this educational program by increasing their visibility and being safe by becoming proactive in highway safety. The counties that have implemented the program's recommendations have benefited by reducing the number of crashes involving agricultural equipment, and the reduction in the number of crashes has saved lives and prevented serious injuries.

Patience is a trait that should be exercised by all highway users, and doing so will allow everyone to go home safely at the end of the day. That patience helps the agricultural industry continue to be North Carolina's number one provider of income, at just over \$72 billion annually. Sharing the road is everyone's responsibility, and being proactive about preventing a possible injury incident is just plain smart. NCMJ

Norman Harrell extension agent, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, North Carolina State University.

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Reference

1. Hughes R, Rodgman E. Crashes Involving Farm Tractors and Other Farm Vehicles/ Equipment in North Carolina 1995-1999. University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000. <http://www.hsrb.unc.edu/pdf/2000/Farm.pdf>. Accessed July 25, 2003.

Address correspondence to Norman Harrell, Wilson County Center, 1806 S Goldsboro Street, Wilson, NC 27893 (norman_harrell@ncsu.edu).