

COUNTRY, Illinois Sheriffs Spread Roadway Safety Message

Gib Cady knows first-hand the tragedy of rural roadway collisions. They make up half of the incidents to which the Henry County sheriff and his deputies respond.

As a lifelong county resident, Cady often finds familiar faces among the victims of these incidents. For those reasons, he plans to use the Sept. 20-26 National Farm Safety and Health Week theme, "Rural Roadway Safety – Alert, Aware and Alive," to create added awareness and reduce farm equipment collisions.

According to a COUNTRY Financial annual survey, roadway collisions involving farm equipment accounted for 24 percent of Illinois farm deaths from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009. Roadway collisions ranked as the second leading cause of farm deaths behind tractor rollovers.

"Roadway safety requires a continuous educational program. Our county Farm Bureau is good about making sure farmers have new, properly placed slow moving vehicle (SMV) symbols on their equipment," says Cady, of the red and orange SMV triangle.

Displaying SMV symbols properly constitutes only part of roadway safety education. Cady recently helped the Illinois Sheriff's Association (ISA) create a new Highway and Farm Safety Committee to address rural roadway crashes. Cady, ISA president, wants to find a method to measure roadway incidents involving farm equipment throughout Illinois.

The committee and members of the Illinois Roadway Safety Group, which includes COUNTRY, have discussed developing a roadway crash form. The form could be used by law enforcement first responders to gather data about collision causes and injuries. Data could then be used to increase roadway safety awareness for farmers and rural motorists, and reduce rural roadway collisions.

"The worst accidents seem to involve farm tractors. It's difficult to pull up to something like that. We need to do everything we can to prevent roadway collisions and save lives," says Cady.

To further increase roadway safety awareness, Cady and his 76 deputies plan to distribute a new Illinois Farm Bureau brochure to motorists at events throughout the summer. "Share the Road Safely" includes tips for rural motorists and farmers.

Cady says rural motorists can prevent collisions by:

- Taking their foot off the gas as soon as they see farm equipment.
- Passing farm equipment only if they know conditions are safe.
- Exercising extreme caution on rural roadway hills and curves.

Farmers sharing the road should remember to:

- Avoid peak traffic hours and the busiest roads when moving farm equipment.
- Use escort vehicles when moving equipment. Escort vehicles should closely follow farm equipment to afford the highest visibility and warning.
- Pull over and allow traffic to pass if road and shoulder conditions are safe.

“Every second in life is a second that cannot be relived especially if that last second is the last second of your life,” says Cady. “Don’t carelessly waste your seconds.”