Farm and Ranch Vehicle Compliance

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Every day, farmers and ranchers across the Southern Great Plains load up their trucks and trailers with agricultural products, machinery or supplies, and haul those materials to and from their farms and ranches. Every time they do, they could be subject to the tangled web of transportation regulations implemented and enforced by an alphabet soup of state and federal agencies. Navigating these state and federal regulations can make hauling a trailer load of hay from one pasture to the next much more difficult than it seems.

Following is general information regarding the regulation of “commercial motor vehicles” and how it might apply to farmers or ranchers. However, anyone who regularly transports agricultural products, machinery or supplies with a vehicle larger than a 3/4-ton pickup or with a truck-trailer combination should contact his/her local Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Public Safety (DPS) or Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office for specific guidance in complying with federal and state regulations.

Extensive operational and administrative requirements are placed on vehicles that are classified as commercial motor vehicles (CMV). As a general rule, CMVs are defined by their weight rating and the locations in which they operate. A vehicle is a CMV if it travels intrastate (within the boundaries of a single state) and has a gross combined weight rating (GCWR combines the ratings of both the power unit and the trailer) of 26,001 or more pounds. Alternatively, a vehicle is classified as a CMV if it travels interstate (across state lines) and has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR is just the power unit) of 10,001 pounds or more, whichever is greater.

It is easy to envision how the weight rating threshold could quickly be surpassed during regular farm or ranch activities. Driving a 3/4-ton pickup (GVWR typically between 8,600-9,600 lbs.) pulling a medium-duty trailer (GVWR typically between 14,000-17,400 lbs.) from one location to another in Oklahoma could potentially subject the driver to CMV requirements. Likewise, simply driving a 1-ton pickup (GVWR typically between 11,000-13,000 lbs.) across the state line to buy feed could subject the driver to the same requirements.

Requirements for drivers of CMVs include, among other things, (1) commercial drivers licenses (“CDL”); (2) controlled substance and alcohol testing; (3) legal trade name and DOT number markings on the vehicle; (4) hours of service logs; (5) medical cards; (6) various inspection, safety and maintenance requirements; and (7) pre-employment review of driver qualifications.

Fortunately for agricultural producers, vehicles that qualify for a farm tag at your local DMV/DPS office enjoy a limited exemption from many of the requirements listed above. Specifically, drivers of vehicles with a farm tag are exempt from (1) the CDL requirement; (2) the controlled substance and drug testing; and (3) the driver qualification requirements. Drivers of farm-tagged vehicles are also exempt from the hours-of-service log requirement so long as they stay within 100 radial air-miles of the commodity source or farm supply distribution point.

Unfortunately, farm vehicles are not exempt from the legal trade name and DOT number marking requirements, nor a majority of the inspection, safety and maintenance requirements for CMVs. These requirements must be satisfied for any vehicle that exceeds the CMV weight ratings. Additionally, the medical card requirement is subject to a limited exemption that largely applies to...
vehicles without trailers. Producers should consult their local DMV/DOT/DPS office for specific details regarding medical cards.

Finally, and most importantly, all of the exemptions above are subject to one key limitation. The exemptions only apply so long as the vehicles are operated within 150 air miles of the agricultural producer’s farm or ranch. If the vehicle exceeds the weight ratings for a CMV, and the vehicle is being operated outside a 150 air-mile radius, the driver will be subject to all requirements for a CMV, whether or not the vehicle has a farm tag.

For more details regarding CMV regulations and how they apply to vehicles without trailers, producers should consult their local DMV/DOT/DPS office for specific details regarding medical cards.

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