

## **Harvest Safety is a Two-Way Street – Terri Black**

Not many activities rival driving down a country road with the windows down and the radio turned up loud. These drives are best experienced during the perfect weather of spring and fall, which happen to coincide with two of Burke County's biggest events: planting and harvesting the crops which sustain the economy of our farm families and much of our community.

It is during these times that farmers undertake one of the most dangerous activities of the year: driving and carrying equipment over public roads. The Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) reports that last year in Georgia, there were 300 crashes involving vehicles and farm equipment, and five deaths occurred as a result of these crashes. A little teamwork and a lot of patience can go a long way in keeping Burke County's roads safer and more enjoyable. Georgia Farm Bureau and GOHS provide several tips for motorists and farmers that can help reduce these types of collisions.

If you are a motorist, be aware that most vehicle-farm equipment crashes occur during an attempt to pass. Never pass unless you can see clearly ahead of your vehicle and the vehicle you are passing. Do not pass if there are any curves or hills ahead that may block your view or the view of oncoming vehicles. Don't assume farm equipment that pulls to the right side of the road is turning right or is letting you pass. Farmers must sometimes pull to the right to make wide left turns. Check the operator's hand signals and check the left side of the road for gates, driveways or field entrances. Always remain alert and keep your attention on the road. When equipment is moving slowly, you may approach more quickly than you realize.

If you are a farmer, you should know that Georgia law requires you to place a slow moving vehicle reflector on equipment that travels the road slower than 25 miles per hour. Always point the triangle reflector up, keep the emblem clean to maximize reflectivity, and replace the emblem when it fades. Mark the edges of equipment with reflective tape and reflectors. Install retrofit lighting on older machinery to increase visibility. Turn on your lights, but turn off spotlights when traveling on roads. Don't drive before sunrise or after sunset. Use warning flashers to caution approaching motorists to slow down. Use signal lights or proper hand signals to let motorists know your intention to turn in advance. Equipment drivers should not encourage or signal motorists when to pass but should pull over when it is safe to allow traffic to pass.

Remember that very few farmers enjoy disrupting the flow of traffic, but they are simply trying to do their jobs. Remain alert, and instead of losing your patience, remember how much you enjoy blue jeans, peanut butter sandwiches, and driving with the windows down!