



Rules OF THE *Country* *Road*



A project of the
Illinois Farm Bureau® Quality of Life ACTION TEAM

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Introduction

There's nothing better than a Sunday drive in the country, right? Drivers and passengers alike will enjoy seeing farms, farm machinery at work, crops growing or being harvested, and farm animals grazing in fields. Where is all that traffic you're used to seeing in town? There is a noticeable lack of traffic on rural roads. Country driving is scenic and can be relaxing; however, country driving is not just about enjoying the pastoral scenery. Safety is rule number one.

Due to the nature of country roads, weather, and road conditions, drivers must be diligent and pay attention. Those mild mannered cows grazing in their pasture could be on the road just around the bend. That farm machinery may likewise take to the road as it moves from field to field to accomplish farm tasks...and due to their width tractors, combines, and the like are sometimes forced to use a portion of another traffic lane. In addition, many of us rely on GPS to get us around, but many roads may not be sufficiently marked to help you find your way.

Rules of the Country Road alerts drivers, farmers and motorists alike, to the things that are unique to traveling our rural roadways. With a little knowledge, a good dose of common sense, and a little bit of courtesy, we can all share our rural roads more safely. So the next time you take that Sunday drive in the country, keep these things in mind to keep everyone safer on the road.



Rural Road Characteristics/Conditions

Rural roads have unique characteristics and conditions. They are not city streets and they are not maintained in the same manner. To maximize the pleasure of driving in the country as well as safety, it is important to recognize the differences. This photo shows a variety of conditions that are typical of country roads. Draw an arrow from the listed road condition to its location on the photo:

- Poor and damaged surface (2)
- Blind hill (unmarked)
- No shoulders
- Narrow road
- Lack of marking (striping)
- Blocked visibility (3)
- Wide load



Country roads are often narrow with very narrow shoulders or none at all, making it more difficult to safely get completely off the road if necessary. The road surface itself may be paved, oil and chip, or gravel. Driving on loose gravel is more dangerous than on pavement. Slow down to avoid skidding or throwing gravel on other vehicles. Gravel also often causes flying dust, which can limit visibility. In the country, the road is often unmarked, so there are no lines to guide you (none marking the edges of the road or the center). This is extremely hazardous at night, as there are no street lights either, to light your way. Use caution, slow down, and stay on the right side of the road.

Look who's hiding behind that corn row! Country corners are often “blind” corners. When the crops are tall, you just can't see what's approaching that intersection. Note that there is a street sign, but no stop sign for either direction. This is also typical in the country. Use extreme caution when approaching rural intersections, and be sure to look both ways.



Here's another narrow, poor condition road with no shoulders and a narrow, unmarked bridge, which could be very dangerous in low light or at night.

Even in daylight, a car could be on top of the bridge before the driver

knows it's there, especially with the tall grass hiding it.

Below is a **railroad crossing** with no gates or lights, on a road with no shoulders and an unmarked curve. Use extreme caution on unmarked roads and always drive defensively. Also note that ditches may appear shallow but actually be deep. Grass depth is deceptive and sometimes hides culverts that a person could fall into when exiting their car.



Weather and Country Roads

Various weather can create hazardous driving conditions on Illinois roads. Slow down and take special care in fog, rain, high winds, and winter driving conditions.

Illinois weather is variable and sometimes drastic changes can occur. Due to extreme fluctuations in weather conditions, roads can take a beating. Freezing and thawing can damage and even destroy rural roads. Conversely, summer sun can soften oil and chip road surfaces, leaving them subject to damage by traffic and causing oil spatters on vehicles.

Flooding is also not uncommon on rural roads. Heavy rains can overflow creeks and waterways, flooding roads and making them impassable. Be aware that in certain areas of the state, irrigation can cause wet pavement. Be on the lookout for water on the road. Never attempt to drive through standing water.

Winter brings its own set of problems with drifting snow and/or icy conditions; closing roads, causing delays, and creating serious travel hazards. Realize that rural roads are not maintained at the same level as city streets. It could be days before roads are cleared, so be sure to plan ahead.

Wind can also add challenges to rural driving. Besides blowing rain or snow, high winds can kick up clouds of freshly plowed dirt, field debris, or dust from gravel roads making it difficult to see the road and other vehicles. Be alert in windy conditions and be prepared to adjust your driving accordingly.



Rural Road Use

Rural Illinois is a wonderful place to live and is populated with working farms. Many types of vehicles are used in the business of farming and all must share the roads with motorists and others.

In the country, school buses may make frequent unexpected stops or may turn into unmarked lanes. Be alert when traveling near a school bus on a rural road.



Also watch for postal deliveries or residents stopping at their mailbox to pick up their mail. This can cause unexpected sudden stops. Use caution when you see someone at a mailbox and be prepared to stop.

In addition to school buses and postal carriers, there are a number of others motorists may encounter on the rural road including bicyclists, runners, pedestrians, ATVs (all-terrain vehicles), horseback riders, motorcyclists, and in the winter, snow mobiles.

In all cases, be cautious, give them plenty of room, and be prepared to stop quickly. Refrain from sounding your horn to avoid startling walkers, cyclists, and horseback riders.



A Word About Planting and Harvest: Farming is a seasonal occupation and two times in the year are the times you will encounter more farm vehicles/equipment on the road. Planting occurs in the Spring, usually April and May (but can vary around the state), and harvest generally occurs in the Fall in September, October, and November. Wheat, hay, and other summer crops are also harvested in some parts of the state. During these times, activity is at its highest in the country. Be aware and be more diligent. Motorists will encounter more large, and slow-moving vehicles on the road, while others may be parked near the edge of the road.



Sometimes, farm equipment will take up more than one lane. Use extreme caution during planting and harvest and be prepared to stop quickly.

These vehicles also make big **wide turns**. When they are pulling to the side of the road, don't assume they are pulling over to allow you to pass, they may just be preparing to turn. Watch for them to acknowledge your presence and signal their turn. Pay close attention to the turn signals, especially before passing.



Slow Moving Vehicles



Learn to recognize this symbol...it alerts you that you are following a slow-moving vehicle, one that typically travels at less than 25 mph. Look for the slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem on the rear of farm equipment and other slow-moving vehicles. It has a red-orange fluorescent triangle at its center, surrounded by a highly reflective red border. This sign is common on rural roads and drivers must heed its warning. When you see the SMV emblem - SLOW DOWN!

Farm tractors generally move at top speeds from 15 to 20 mph. When approaching from the rear, a car traveling at normal speed can overtake a slow-moving vehicle very quickly. When driving in the country, watch for SMV emblems and be patient. The driver will pull over to let you pass as soon as it's safe to do so. Pass only in a legal passing zone.

The SMV emblem should only be displayed on slow-moving vehicles. Illinois law prohibits other uses such as using the SMV emblem as a lane marker or gate sign. Those who use it illegally are subject to a fine.

Courtesy

Public roads are accessible to everyone. Whether you're driving for business or pleasure, drivers of all vehicles must *share the road* safely and courteously. Courtesy is an important part of defensive driving, and goes a long way in keeping driving safe and enjoyable for all. Here are some common sense tips to follow when sharing the roadways with others:

Be alert to others on the road

Be patient and pass with caution when safe to do so

Allow others to pass when necessary (and safe)

Never gesture rudely to another (driver, pedestrian, cyclist, etc.)

Give a wide berth to walkers, bicyclists, runners, etc.

Maintain a safe following distance

Keep horn honking to a minimum

Drive the speed limit

Stay in your lane unless passing

Use your blinker

Put the cell phone down!



Summary/Resources

The Illinois Farm Bureau Quality of Life ACTION TEAM wants everyone to be safe on rural roads. Rules of the Country Road reminds all motorists to be cautious, to look out for things that are unique to country driving, and to share the road with courtesy. It is not intended to be a complete driving manual. For information on specific driving laws and regulations, always refer to the Illinois *Rules of the Road* (see link below).

Drive Safely!

Resources:

Get the current Illinois *Rules of the Road* at:

www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/pdf_publications/dsd_a112.pdf



Find the Illinois Farm Bureau *The CODE of COUNTRY LIVING* at:

www.ilfb.org/media/66828/code_of_country_living_1_.pdf

Find the Illinois Farm Bureau *Rules of the Country Road* at:

www.ilfb.org/safety



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SHARE THE ROAD!

These words save lives.

**Remember them when you see
farmers – and their equipment –
on rural roads during all seasons.**



Illinois Department
of Transportation

