



July 20, 2007

TALL CORN, DANGEROUS RURAL INTERSECTIONS

Now is the time to really be careful and think about safety when driving rural intersections. At the Extension office last week, a long time Saline County farmer from Swanton shared a story about his accident on a rural road northeast of town at an intersection 20 years ago. Today, he drives the same intersection and it is just as dangerous, or even more so, with tall corn on three of the four corners. I failed to ask if all three corners had crop planted on county right-of-way. If so, it makes the intersections even more dangerous.

The farmer I talked to does a great job in shredding his road ditches along rural roads where he farms and even includes two neighbors. They do not even say thank you, but that doesn't matter so much because he enjoys making his neighborhood looking better and keeping it safer at intersections. He said it doesn't take very much time for a landowner or tenant to make an intersection safer. I asked how and he said it simply means sponsoring fifty stalks or approximately a bushel of corn. He put out a plea for area farmers to make Saline County a safer place to drive. It could save a life or serious medical bill.

Bruce Filipi, Saline County Roads Superintendent, said local bus drivers have reported dangerous intersections and farmers have stripped back crop leaving the ears which helps bus and pickup drivers. If there is brush or trees, call Bruce and the County will take care of it. If it is weeds, that is the landowner or tenants responsibility unless the weeds are on the noxious weed list. The County has a brush cutter that can be used and Filipi will work with area landowners beyond right-of-way at dangerous intersections.

For most people, riding in a motor vehicle is one of the most dangerous things they ever do, and this is particularly true when traveling on our rural roads. While U.S. Census figures show that about two out of ten (21 percent) Americans live in rural areas, the U.S. Department of Transportation has found that about six out of ten (57 percent) highway deaths happen on roads that it considers rural. Nebraska is 12th on the list of most dangerous. Iowa is 4th with Maine being number one.

A safer way to think of these intersections is for drivers to treat each of those intersections as though it had a yield or stop sign. Motorists should at least slow down and not enter the intersection until they are absolutely certain there are no vehicles coming from the side roads and then proceed with caution. But unfortunately, we all know some drivers treat our rural roads with any speed limits that the road will carry, and all too often racing through intersections too fast. We just have less drivers than what we used to, which has helped keep fatalities down. With the change in farm size and the number of rural families, are we going to see more rural intersections in the future where no one cares anymore?

Fifty stalks and a sharp corn knife could really help and prevent an accident. For some drivers, it doesn't matter. With the one bushel of corn sponsorship rule, at least you wouldn't have to completely stop at each intersection in bad areas of the county. The county always has inquiries



about new stop signs, but that doesn't work either, and isn't required with wheat, alfalfa, beans, etc. With more corn going to ethanol plants, the situation will not get better, but it would help if everyone pitches in and does their part. This would be a great 4-H, FFA, or youth activity to make our rural intersections a safer place to drive the rest of this summer and fall. Think about the school kids, bus drivers, and truck drivers this fall, too.

Saline and Lancaster County Wheat Variety Test Plot Results In -Give our office a call or go to www.saline.unl.edu.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465
Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu