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Road Use of Agricultural Vehicles - Shropshire

The NFU represents 55,000 members across England and Wales. In addition, we have 20,000 NFU Countryside members with an interest in farming and rural life.

In Shropshire, the NFU represents approximately 1600 members

Agricultural in Shropshire Overview

Key statistics

- Holdings – 3,719 agricultural holdings recorded in 2016. Shropshire has the sixth largest number of farm holdings compared to other authorities in England.
- Farmed land – Total amount of farmed land in Shropshire in 2016 was 264,325 hectares which amounts to 76% of the total land area in the county. Shropshire is the ninth largest county in terms of the amount of farmed land in England.
- Farm Type - The use of farmland in Shropshire is set out in the table below (2016 figures)¹

Farm Type	Area ha	%
Grassland	148,084	56%
Cereals	66,489	25%
Arable crops	32,244	12%
Fruit	1,405	1%
Other	16,103	6%
Total	264,325	100%

- Employment – In 2016 there were 9,731 people working in agriculture. This is an increase of 5% compared to 2013. Shropshire has more people working in agriculture than any other local authority except Herefordshire and Cornwall.²
- Farm Business – 3,365 farm businesses were recorded in Shropshire. This is the highest number of any business category in the county. A farm business may have control more than one agricultural holding. This may explain the slight variance between total businesses and total holdings. The number of farm businesses increased by 12% in the period 2010 to 2018.³
- GVA - Agriculture accounts for £169 million of total GVA in Shropshire.⁴

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june>

² <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/10640/survey-of-agriculture-report-july-2018.pdf>

³ <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/4196/shropshire-economic-profile-january-2017-v2.pdf>

⁴ <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/10640/survey-of-agriculture-report-july-2018.pdf>

In Shropshire agriculture plays a more significant role in the life and the economy of the county compared to other county and unitary authorities.

Road Traffic Overview

Vehicle registrations

Agricultural vehicles form a very small part of the overall vehicle road going fleet e.g. in 2018 2.9 million new vehicles were first registered in the UK⁵ of which only 12,102 were agricultural tractors (0.4%).⁶

In 2018 a total of 38.2 million vehicles were registered in the UK. An exact total for agricultural vehicles registered in the UK is not available but it is estimated the entire agricultural fleet is approximately 400,000 vehicles.⁷

Vehicle numbers by category in 2018 are:

- Cars - 31.5 m
- LGV – 4 m
- HGV – 0.5m
- Motor bikes – 1.2m
- All other vehicles (inc. agriculture) – 0.9m

Traffic volumes by road type

Rural 'A' roads account for 30% of all vehicle miles travelled and rural minor roads account for 14%.

Traffic volumes on rural roads have in general increased but primarily by cars and vans as can be seen in the table below.

Vehicle type	% growth 2013 to 2018
Cars	+7.7%
Vans	+21.2%
Lorries	-10.5%
Motorcycles	-8.3%
Other vehicles (inc. agriculture)	-21.9%

There is some evidence that increased maximum weights for HGVs has enabled goods to be carried more efficiently by a smaller HGV fleet.

The growth in van traffic could be the result of:

- The growth in internet shopping and home deliveries
- Changes to company car taxation which resulted in vans becoming a cheaper alternative than cars for some company users
- Less strict regulation c.f. HGV vehicles making vans cheaper to operate for commercial haulage

The decline in 'Other vehicles' is attributed mainly to a reduction in public transport provision and a reduction in bus miles travelled.

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800502/vehicle-licensing-statistics-2018.pdf

⁶ <https://aea.uk.com/industry-insight/tractor-statistics/>

⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800502/vehicle-licensing-statistics-2018.pdf

NFU policy and advice to members on road use

We take matters such as road safety very seriously and take action to inform our members of their duties and obligations when operating farm vehicles on the public road. It must also be remembered that the operators of farm vehicles will also make use of the road network on a private basis and so it is in our member's interest to work to ensure that all road users use the network in a safe and responsible way.

It is our policy to promote compliance with the law, to work improve all aspects of health and safety at work and the safe and considerate use of the road network by all road users.

NFU activity to inform our members of their duties and obligations includes:

1. Member access to a suite of Business Guides on transport and health and safety matters. NFU Business Guides are intended to give members the need to know information required to operate their farm businesses efficiently in line with best practice and in compliance with any legal obligations. The suite of Business Guides available to members includes advice on:
 - a. Driver licensing
 - b. Operator license requirements
 - c. Tachograph requirements
 - d. Speed limits and weight limits applicable to agricultural vehicles
 - e. Safe transport of goods
 - f. Health and safety guidance
 - g. Risk assessment guidance
 - h. Transport of dangerous goods on road

NFU Business Guides are an exclusive member benefit and not made publicly available.

2. In addition to the range of Business Guides member briefings are produced on discrete topics at the appropriate time of year. Such briefings include:
 - a. Advice on obligations concerning mud on the road
 - b. Reporting of wide vehicle movements to the police
 - c. The need to maintain driver courtesy and practice considerate driving at all times but especially so around peak road use at harvest
 - d. Safe road use during winter

NFU member briefings are mostly classed as an exclusive member benefit and so not made publicly available.

3. Dedicated web pages on our web site to update members quickly on news items and regulatory changes. The web site is used to highlight key seasonal advice to members e.g. mud on the road prevention.
4. Several weekly and monthly newsletters published on our website or emailed direct to members.
5. A monthly printed magazine British Farmer and Grower which is mailed directly to our 55,000 members. Safety and transport related articles are often featured in the publication.
6. The NFU Farm Safety and Transport Policy Adviser delivers face to face briefings to NFU members using various formats:

- a. Local branch meetings
 - b. Larger scale regional meetings
 - c. High volume (100 + participants) farm safety workshops on transport matters hosted on member's farms
 - d. Online webinars
7. Transport and safety information is published by the NFU regional office and engagement activity with members takes place throughout the year

Physical events are currently suspended because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Complaints regarding agricultural vehicles

We are not aware of persistent complaints of agricultural vehicles:

- Damaging hedges and soft verges and road surfaces
- Depositing mud and animal waste on the highway
- Blocking use of the highway for other users

Regarding surface damage it is important to note that in general terms agricultural vehicles operate vehicles equipped with tyres which have significantly lower air pressures when compared to other vehicles e.g. HGVs. Agricultural vehicles use low pressure tyres to limit soil compaction in order to protect soil structures.

It is an offence under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 to obstruct the highway and our advice to members is not to obstruct the highway and put themselves at risk of enforcement action. We are not aware of any enforcement action concerning obstruction of the highway and we will be grateful for more information on this matter. In particular are complaints about blocking concerning a complete obstruction of the highway or instances where a slower moving vehicle such as a trailer, HGV, horse box or caravan has slowed traffic or delayed overtaking for a period of time?

As mentioned above there has been a significant increase in traffic on rural roads in recent years particularly in vans used for the transport of goods. It may very well be the case that complaints of damage the Council has received may not be attributable to agricultural vehicles especially given the significant increase in van traffic on rural roads. We will be grateful for any additional information you can supply to consider this further. We welcome a discussion on how messaging to our members can be made more effective.

Lastly you will no doubt be aware that the majority of fatal road accidents occur on rural roads and we welcome an opportunity to discuss how we may be able to work together to promote safety messaging to make Shropshire's roads safer for all road users.⁸

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/83458/5/reported-road-casualties-annual-report-2018.pdf