



AFTC PROMOTES SAFETY IN SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL TRANSPORT

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The Agricultural and Food Transporters Conference (AFTC) of the American Trucking Associations (ATA) is rolling out an effort to educate the agricultural industry about the importance of safe operation on rural roads and highways during planting and harvest seasons. At ATA's Winter Leadership Meeting on Feb. 22 in Arlington, Va., AFTC's Board of Directors discussed moving forward with an awareness campaign for truck drivers and their managers to monitor and manage fatigue during agriculture's busy seasons.

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations limit truck drivers' daily and weekly working hours and require hours to be recorded in a log book to be presented to law enforcement upon request. However, flexibility is needed in the agricultural industry to get the job done during the busy seasons, and agricultural haulers are allowed an exemption from these hours of service regulations for specific hauls where timing is critical.

The AFTC seeks partnerships with other agricultural organizations such as those representing farmers as well as processors who purchase farm commodities to distribute the first edition of a "Manager's Guide to Safe Trucking During Agricultural Planting and Harvest Season." The purpose of the guide is to educate truck drivers and their managers in the agricultural industry about fatigue management. Much of the information was taken from a comprehensive textbook, "Safety for the Long Haul," recently released by ATA.

During their meeting, the AFTC Board installed a new chairman, Rick Yost of VY Truckline in Sterling, Colo. VY Truckline transports livestock and livestock feed. "Everyone has heard how farming and ranching are not usually 9 to 5 jobs," Yost said. "Whether you're hauling livestock during peak seasons in the spring and fall, hauling fertilizer to the field for farmers getting ready to plant, or hauling grain during harvest, you have to hit it hard when weather and other variables say it's time to move. At the same time, safety is as important to us as anyone. Accidents cost us directly and indirectly in many ways."

A tomato transporter from California described the harvest season this way; "With perishable commodities such as fruits and vegetables there's a short delivery window. To meet our customer requirements our operation runs 24/7 with day and night shifts. The hauling volume does not change due to the time of night, weekends or holidays. To service our customers we interview 300 seasonal drivers to work 2 to 4 months out of the year. It is like gearing up for the Invasion of Normandy each year because of the seasonality issues."

Part of the guide is taken from a recent conference presentation by Dave Parker, Senior Legal Counsel for Great West Casualty Company. Parker said "the good companies realize that they must always retain that primary focus on safety. For they all recognize that without safe operations, profit and all else disappears quickly." He explained that the exemption from hours of service regulations for agriculture "frees you of maintaining logs and observing hours-of-service, but falling within the exemption does not free you of conducting an operation focused on safety." He called for active management of truck safety. "There may not be a government inspector with an hours-of-service checklist at the trucking company front door every day, nor on the roadside. But, the first time there is an event, incident, accident, or problem, there will be questions and more questions," he said. "At that time, it is too late to develop a credible and responsible set of company rules and policies, and to make available your employees and management to attest to

the existence and enforcement of those rules and policies. The cost of this experience will far outweigh the hoped-for savings of a rule-free operating environment.”