

EU should focus on a fact- and priority-based approach to reduce on-road accidents with farm vehicles

Commission should move away from isolated discussions on single-technology issues with high costs and no proven benefits (like mandatory ABS for slow-moving tractors) & adopt a long-term strategic approach instead

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Brussels, 21 September 2017 – CEMA calls on the EU to focus a fact- and priority-based approach when it comes to reducing on-road accidents with farm vehicles ahead of the next meeting of the Working Group on Agricultural Tractors (WGAT) on 25 September in Brussels which is chaired by the European Commission.

In particular, CEMA calls on the Commission to abandon plans to make ABS braking systems mandatory for tractors driving between 40 and 60km/h in light of the fact that such a move would not really reduce on-road accidents, while exerting huge costs on farmers and agricultural contractors.

“Making ABS mandatory for slow-moving tractors is not a sensible measure. The evidence tells us that such a measure would not lead to tangible benefits in terms of road safety – which is logical since accidents tend to occur mostly due to the rather slow, not the fast, speed of such vehicles on the road. Yet if there is no tangible benefit to be expected, there is no justification to push the huge costs on manufacturers and farmers that would come with such a measure”, said Gilles Dryancour, Chair of CEMA’s Public Policy Group (PPG).

The comments were made following the Commission’s release on Tuesday of a draft study designed to assess the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of such a measure.¹

The draft confirms that the costs of the planned ABS implementation would be high and unlikely to be outweighed by the expected benefits, since, for instance, the possible net positive effect on overall crashes is estimated to be “small” – only to suggest somewhat surprisingly later on that limiting the mandatory introduction of ABS to tractors driving above 50km/h might still be a possible way forward.

“Our conclusion regarding ABS is clear: the case for mandatory EU rules for tractors below 60km/h is and remains not proven. The data is insufficient to justify such a move. Some of the assumptions made in the draft study have factual and methodological shortfalls which will need to be discussed and addressed”, Dryancour said.²

¹ Study on the availability of anti-lock braking systems for agricultural and forestry vehicles with a maximum design speed between 40 km/h and 60 km/h (DRAFT)

² The case is markedly different for fast tractors above 60km/h for which ABS is already mandatory in the EU.

“What is also important to keep in mind is that the vast majority of EU Member States does not even allow tractors to drive above 40km/h anyway. So there is no need for EU rules which would force to equip ABS systems on tractors per design speed which are not legally needed in 22 out of 28 Member States. This would be the Internal Market approach turned on its head.”

Looking ahead, CEMA calls on the Commission to stop allowing isolated discussions on single-technology issues (like ABS) from dragging valuable time, attention and resources away from taking real action at the EU level and instead to start adopting a long-term strategic approach on how to reduce and prevent on-road accidents with farm vehicles by 2035.

CEMA Secretary General Ulrich Adam said: *“There are a number of workable, effective and cost-efficient measures readily available that can make a real difference in reducing on-road accidents with farm vehicles in the EU. We have outlined these priority measures in our **Roadmap for Action**, combined with the industry’s **Pledge** to cut on-road accidents with farm vehicles in the EU by 50% by 2035.”*³

“The Commission should lead the way and establish a new intra-stakeholder Dialogue Group to obtain a better understanding of the available data, to share best practices, and to make specific recommendations on how to reduce on-road accidents with farm machines. This is the best way forward, and we call on all stakeholders to contribute and get involved”, Adam concluded.

Background Information:

The number of on-road accidents with farm machines in the EU is very low (when compared to accidents with other vehicles) and has decreased continuously and significantly in the last years (e.g. -36% & -38% from 1998–2013 in the Netherlands and Spain), while the reduction of non-fatal accidents has been even higher. Still, on average, around 400 fatal on-road accidents occur in the EU every year in which an agricultural machine is involved. The majority of accidents is not caused directly by the farm machine or its driver, but occurs as the result of other factors such as the lack of awareness of other vehicle drivers on e.g. narrow and winding country roads. Effective, evidence-based priority measures are therefore needed to reduce this number of accidents further.

The European agricultural machinery industry is fully committed to contribute to this goal and has therefore made a common Pledge: to reduce the number of fatal on-road accidents with farm machines in the EU by 50% by 2035. To make this Pledge a reality, CEMA calls on all stakeholders to work together and contribute to reaching this goal. To do this, CEMA proposes the establishment of a new EU Dialogue Group. The Group should focus on: a better understanding of the available data; sharing of best practices in EU Member States; and making recommendations on how to reduce on-road accidents with farm machines.

Meaningful and effective reduction efforts will have to focus on different aspects such as maintenance, periodical inspections, up-grading of the legacy fleet, driver behaviour as well as public awareness campaigns, and not merely on safety design features of new vehicles.

³ Industry pledges to halve fatal on-road accidents with farm machines by 2035: <http://www.cema-agri.org/publication/industry-pledges-halve-fatal-road-accidents-farm-machines-2035>

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