Farmers say drivers' crazy behaviours are distracting and dangerous

Continued from pg. 1

Trafalgar Road farmer Jeff Nurse agrees there is a major problem.

"I'm one of the lucky ones," said Nurse. "Most of our farm land is situated so that we don't have to drive on the road, and we avoid it whenever we can. But I hear from other farmers that there is a real problem out there.

"The crazy part is the people don't realize how much they are at risk, not the operator of the machinery," continued Nurse.

Weststeyn agrees.

"I'm driving a combine that weighs around 17 tons, while they're in a car that might weigh two (tons)," said Weststeyn. "If something were to happen, chances are they'd get hurt a lot more than me.

"Yet they still challenge me," continued Weststeyn. "Lots of times drivers will pull up into the left turn lane when I'm sitting at traffic lights. As soon as the light changes (green) they race straight through in front of me, trying to get ahead."

All farmers agree that not only is having the insults and crazy behaviour thrown at them annoying, it's distracting.

Someone blowing a horn behind them can make it quite difficult for an operator. That person might be simply voicing their annoyance at the slow-moving equipment in front of them, but the operator can't help but wonder if there is something wrong 'back there'— perhaps something has come loose, or there's a problem with the machinery.

"I try to accommodate drivers whenever I can," said Weststeyn, "but it must be a two-way street. If I can get over and let them by, I'm only too happy to do that, and clear the backlog (of traffic) behind me. I'm not out there to hold them up and make them late, I'm just trying to get to the next field."

Although the problem between urban drivers and farmers has always been there, Nurse feels it's having a negative impact on farming in Halton Hills.

"Many farmers are getting turned off with trying to farm in this area because of the traffic issues," said Nurse. "It's simply not worth the aggravation and risks."

Dairy farmer Paul Laidlaw of Norval knows firsthand how people react to farm vehicles on the road. With his operation located on Winston Churchill Boulevard, he takes more than his share of abuse on the road.

Drivers pass on the shoulder, in the left turn lane, or any other place they can slip past the big machinery on the road.

"I'd say 99 per cent of the drivers are great," said Laidlaw. "They are patient, and some even wave to me to say it's okay when I'm making a left turn. But that remaining one per cent is the problem. They're the ones who are in a rush.

"Being a livestock producer, I'm on the road with some sort of equipment almost every day, during the growing season," said Laidlaw. "I've been yelled at, screamed at, honked at and sworn at on a consistent basis. I just keep the radio turned on real loud in the (tractor) cab, and try to ignore it."

"When we're working on one of the farms below us, we don't start until after 9 a.m., and actually move back to the home farm before 3 p.m., to try to avoid being on Winston Churchill (Boulevard) when it's busy."

"Sometimes we get up at 4:30 a.m. to move the equipment over before there is traffic," continued Laidlaw. "Farm equipment is getting bigger and wider, and the roads are rough so we can only go so fast. I know we take up a lot of the road, and we're slow, but we have to be on the road. But we're farming and we need to be there, just like everyone else on the road.

"Traffic congestion is one of the major reasons why so many farmers have left and moved from Halton and Peel, into other farming areas," added Laidlaw.

"I tell you, when we make that turn into our laneway, and drivers are honking and yelling at us, no one is happier to be off that road than us. It's nothing but a nightmare— Five and 10 Sideroads used to quiet little roads, now they're like Steeles Avenue was 10 years ago."

Don Rowntree, who farms south of Georgetown, is regularly on the road drawing hay. Although his operation is relatively well contained within a three mile radius, traveling on the road is still a major nuisance.

"As much as there is all this signage saying it's an 'active farming area', I don't really think many drivers understand what a slow-moving-vehicle sign is," said Rowntree, "That orange triangle means nothing to them."

Rowntree says many of the drivers wave at him to pull over on the shoulder, to allow them to pass.

"That's not possible," said Rowntree. "I have no idea if the shoulders are firm enough to support the load, and I have to watch for mailboxes, culverts and washouts. I get lots of 'sign language' from these folks— they just don't get it. I have as much right to be on the road as them."

All of these farmers agree that there is one aspect that the drivers who are dishing out the abuse seem to forget. They rely on these same farmers to feed this country.

But that's not much of a consolation.

"Until they (urban drivers) realize that we're out there because we have to be, not because we want to be," said Weststeyn. "I don't really expect the situation will change much."

mazda

Mazda's BEST CLEARANCE EVENT

ON ALL 2011 MODELS

BEST DRIVE. ✓ BEST SELECTION. ✓ BEST TIME TO BUY. ✓ BEST OFFERS. ✓

0% FINANCING† FOR UP TO 84 MONTHS OR 0% LEASE APR* + UP TO $2,000 DEALER SIGNING BONUS‡

Hurry, offers end August 31st.

2011 MAZDA 2
Finance from $95†† bi-weekly at 2.9% APR for 84 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $500‡
GS model shown

2011 MAZDA 3
Finance from $109†† bi-weekly at 2.9% APR for 84 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $500‡
GT model shown

2011 MAZDA 6
Finance from $165†† bi-weekly at 0% APR for 72 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $1,000‡
GT-I4 model shown

2011 TRIBUTE
Finance from $139†† bi-weekly at 0% APR for 84 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $1,000‡
GT-V6 model shown

2011 CX-7
Finance from $218†† bi-weekly at 0% APR for 60 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $1,000‡
GT model shown

2011 CX-9
Finance from $295†† bi-weekly at 0% APR for 60 months + DEALER SIGNING BONUS $2,000‡
GT model shown

See your Mazda dealer or visit mazda.ca for details.

WHAT DO YOU DRIVE? zoom-zoom

†0% APR Purchase Financing is available on all new 2011 Mazda vehicles. 84-month term available on 2011 MX-5, RX-8 and Tribute. Other terms vary by model. Based on a representative agreement using an offered pricing of $23,450 for the new 2011 Tribute GX-I4 (WVXD51AA00) with a financed amount of $20,000, the cost of borrowing for an 84-month term is $0, monthly payment is $238.10, total finance obligation is $20,000. *0% APR Lease Financing is available on new 2011 Mazda vehicles (excluding the 2011 MX-5, RX-8 and Tribute). Using the new 2011 Mazda3 GX (D4XS51AA00) as a representative example with a lease APR of 0% and monthly payments of $254.79 for 36 months, the total lease obligation is $9,172.50, including down payment of $0. Lease payments include freight and P.D.E. of $1,495. 20,000 km per year mileage allowance applies; if exceeded, additional 8¢ - 12¢ per km applies. Offered leasing available to retail customers only. Lease terms vary by region and trim level/model. ‡Dealer Signing Bonuses are available on retail purchase/finance/lease of all new, in-stock 2011 Mazda models from August 3rd – 31st, 2011. Bonus amounts vary by model. Maximum $2,000 Dealer Signing Bonus available on 2011 MX-5, RX-8 and CX-9 models. $500/$500/$1,000/$1,000/$1,000/$2,000 Dealer Signing Bonus applies to new 2011 Mazda2/2011 Mazda3/2011 Mazda6/2011 Tribute/2011 CX-7/2011 CX-9 models. Visit mazda.ca or see your dealer for complete details. †† Financed Pricing for new 2011 Mazda2 GX (B5XB51AA00)/2011 Mazda3 GX (D4XS51AA00)/2011 Mazda6 GS-I4 (G4SY61AA00)/2011 Tribute GX-I4 (WVXD51AA00)/2011 CX-9 GS (QVSB81AA00) is $15,601/$17,901/$25,801/$25,356/$28,401/$38,301 financed at 2.9%/2.9%/0%/0%/0%/0% over 84/84/72/84/60/60 months equals bi-weekly payments of $95/$109/$165/$139/$218/$295 with $0/$0/$0/$0/$0/$0 down payment, cost of borrowing is $1,646/$1,888/$0/$0/$0/$0 with a total obligation of $17,247/$19,789/$25,801/$25,356/$28,401/$38,301. As shown, Offered Pricing for 2011 Mazda2 GS (B5SB51AA00)/2011 Mazda3 GT (D4TY61AA00)/2011 Mazda6 GT-I4 (G4TY61AB00)/2011 Tribute GT-V6 (WXTZ71AA00)/2011 CX-7 GT (PXTJ81AA00)/2011 CX-9 GT (QXTB81AA00) is $19,901/$26,131/$33,896/$36,901/$38,596/$47,501 financed at 2.9%/2.9%/0%/0%/0%/0% over 84/84/72/84/60/60 months and equalling bi-weekly payments of $121/$159/$217/$203/$297/$365 with $0/$0/$0/$0/$0/$0 down payment, the cost of borrowing is $2,099/$2,756/$0/$0/$0/$0 with a total obligation of $22,000/$28,887/$33,896/$36,901/$38,596/$47,501. All offers include freight, P.D.E. and fees. Offers exclude HST, PPSA, licence, insurance, taxes, down payment and other dealer charges are extra and may be required at the time of purchase. Dealer may sell/lease for less. Dealer trade may be necessary on certain vehicles. Lease and Finance on approved credit for qualified customers only. Offers valid until August 31st, 2011 while supplies last. Offers subject to change without notice. Visit mazda.ca or see your dealer for complete details.