

Bills dealing with ag motor vehicles survive initial approval

Written by Marianne Goodland, Legislative reporter

Two bills dealing with the motor vehicle issues for farmers and ranchers got through their initial approval processes last week.

On Jan. 24 the House Transportation Committee approved House Bill 11-1024, which would create an agricultural youth license.

According to its sponsor, Rep. Ed Vigil, D-Alamosa, the bill allows teens at 14 years of age to get the learner's permit and at 14 years and 6 months the license, as long as a parent or other guardian signs an affidavit of liability and the teen lives or works on a farm.

Until the age of 16, and under the ag youth license, the teen must obtain 50 hours of supervised driving experience. The teen may drive unsupervised if driving to "further the commercial purposes of an ag business" or between the farm or ranch and residence "using the most direct and accessible route." Otherwise, the teen must be accompanied by a licensed adult in the front seat.

Vigil, who grew up on a farm, said in his family, everyone had to help with the farm, and by the time he was 14 he was already driving. "It keeps them engaged, gives them a good work ethic," he said. The bill is similar to laws in Nebraska and Kansas, Vigil explained.

The bill could possibly generate as much as \$207,152 in annual revenue, primarily through the fees for issuing the licenses.

HB 1024 is supported by the Colorado Cattleman's Association. Addressing safety concerns raised by the committee, Terry Fankhauser of CCA said it's in ag's interest to maintain a safe environment on the road, and the bill wouldn't change that.

"These young people are well-trained and learn to drive at a very early age. It's fundamental in a unique industry like ours."

Rep. Randy Fischer, D-Fort Collins, said driving on an unpaved county road wasn't a problem, but what happens when a teen has to drive on a highway, like Highway 85, where the speed

Bills dealing with ag motor vehicles survive initial approval

Written by Marianne Goodland, Legislative reporter

limit is 65 mph? Fankhauser acknowledged that accidents do happen, but the teen drivers addressed by the bill are generally very responsible and are experienced in moving equipment.

“We have to rely” on the judgment of those in agriculture to be responsible, and “those judgment calls aren’t made lightly,” he said.

The bill doesn’t affect the rights of teens to drive on the farm itself; a state patrol representative testified that no driver’s license is needed to drive on private property. The bill also does not allow a teen to drive a commercial motor vehicle for agriculture on the roads, which could be from 10,001 to 96,000 pounds.

The state patrol also has safety concerns about HB 1024, but they are not opposing the bill.

HB 1024 was amended to address the concerns Fischer raised regarding highway driving; under the amendment a holder of an agricultural youth license could not drive on a “limited access highway” where speeds are set above 65 mph.

The amendment was introduced by Rep. Max Tyler, D-Wheat Ridge, who said he grew up on the edges of an agricultural area and that “farm kids were no more responsible” than anyone else, especially in driving, and he originally set the restriction to 55 mph. But at Vigil’s request, Tyler raised the limit to 65 mph.

The committee approved the bill on a 9-3 vote; due to its fiscal note HB 1024 was sent to the House Appropriations Committee for further action.

The House Agricultural Committee also was busy with bills dealing with agricultural issues last week.

Also on Jan. 24, they unanimously approved HB 1004, which deals with farm truck registration. It’s a rehash of a bill vetoed by Gov. Bill Ritter last year.

Bills dealing with ag motor vehicles survive initial approval

Written by Marianne Goodland, Legislative reporter

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Randy Baumgardner, R-Hot Sulphur Springs, who carried the 2010 legislation that passed the General Assembly 99-1.

Current state law says county clerks require proof that an agricultural motor vehicle, such as a farm truck or truck tractor, is used by someone whose primary business is agriculture. Under the bill, that requirement is lifted if the vehicle is used for production on a farm or ranch that is classified as agricultural for property tax purposes.

The bill would generate a minimal increase in state revenues, estimated at about \$22,000 per year, but with a cost of about \$17,000 per year. Because of its fiscal impact, it was sent to House Appropriations.