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BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Fiscal Agency

Lansing, Michigan 48909

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House Bill 4054 (Substitute H-2 as reported without amendment)

Sponsor: Representative Gary Randall

House Committee: Transportation

Senate Committee: State Affairs, Tourism, and Transportation

Date Completed: 6-9-87

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RATIONALE

Under current law, a farm implement wider than 108 inches is prohibited from traveling on the highway between the hours of sunset and sunrise without a special permit. Implements wider than 186 inches cannot be moved on a public highway at any time without a special permit. Reportedly, however, many farmers never bother to apply for permits, and when they move their implements from one field to another, they do so illegally. Recognizing this problem, some have suggested changes in existing law to allow these oversized farm vehicles to travel on the road without a special permit, at certain times and with added safety restrictions.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to eliminate permit requirements and establish new regulations concerning the operation of farm vehicles on the highways of the State. The Michigan Vehicle Code specifies the maximum widths of the various vehicles and loads allowed on the State's roads. If a vehicle or load exceeds its maximum allowable width or if it extends beyond the center line of a State trunkline highway, a special permit must be obtained from the Department of Transportation before the vehicle or load can be on the highway. Currently, farm equipment (including farm tractors) may not be wider than 186 inches without having a special permit, and farm equipment wider than 108 inches may not be moved on the highway between sunset and sunrise.

The bill would strike these provisions concerning farm equipment (called "implements of husbandry") and instead allow anyone to operate or move farm equipment for normal farming operations on State roads regardless of width or time of day without having to obtain a special permit. The equipment would have to be moved in such a way "as to minimize the interruption of traffic flow", and would have to be to the right of the center of the road unless there were obstructions or barriers preventing this. Even if the farm equipment were too wide to stay away from the centerline, however, a special permit would not be needed.

Finally, the bill would require that farm equipment that was moved one-half hour before sunrise or one-half hour after sunset (or at any other time when there was not enough light to allow clear vision of people or vehicles on the highway within 500 feet) have an amber lamp on the side near the front of the vehicle and a red lamp on the side near the rear.

MCL 257.695 and 257.717

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

ARGUMENTS**Supporting Argument**

The bill would aid farmers by eliminating burdensome permit requirements for movement of farm equipment, while adding needed safety regulations such as requiring amber and red lamps to be placed on implements to help alert the traveling public to their presence.

Opposing Argument

The movement of implements at a unlimited width could pose a safety hazard for the public. Allowing a vehicle to cross the centerline could cause accidents, and should be considered a safety hazard requiring more stringent, not less, regulation.

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

H.B. 4054 (6-9-87)