

Trailer Buying Guide

This guide aims to give you the knowledge to ask the right questions when buying or hiring a farm trailer to get equipment that's safe, legal and appropriate to do the job you need it to do.

Basic facts

- All agricultural vehicles, including trailers must comply with legislation such as Construction and Use Regulations whenever they are driven on the road.
- The legal speed limit for any tractor with an unsprung rear axle is 20mph (32km/h) even if fitted with a gearbox capable of higher speeds.
- The maximum weight of a laden tractor and trailer on the road is 24.39t and the maximum laden weight of a conventional unbalanced trailer in this combination is 18.29t, even if the manufacturer's plates state that they can carry more.
- The braking systems for your trailer must be appropriate for the weight and speed of travel.

What do you need the trailer to do?

Don't just buy on cost, consider:

- Frequency of use
- Appropriate size
- Amount of road work
- Number of towing vehicles per trailer
- Compatibility with tractors and other towing equipment

Trailer brakes

It is important that your trailer brakes are appropriate for the speed you intend to travel. Buying a trailer with incorrect brakes can result in premature tractor brake failure due to overwork. The following information provides a good specification for each type of brake system.



	Standard Ag Spec	Commercial Spec
Summary	This specification should only be used for travel up to 20mph	This specification should be used if travel will exceed 20mph
Braking system	Single line hydraulic	Dual line fail-safe (air or hydraulic) with ABS
Wheels	6-8 stud hubs (but can be 10)	10 stud hubs
Foundation brake size (diameter and width)	400mm x 80mm	420mm x 180mm
Cam type	Flat cam	S-cam
Brake ram size	20-25mm hydraulic ram	T20-T24 air actuators or 35mm hydraulic rams
Hydraulic hose size	1/4 inch standard	3/8 – 1/2 inch
Brake arm adjuster	Screw/automatic	Screw/automatic
Min. brake efficiency	25%	45%
Other considerations		Load sensing to avoid wheel lock up when empty



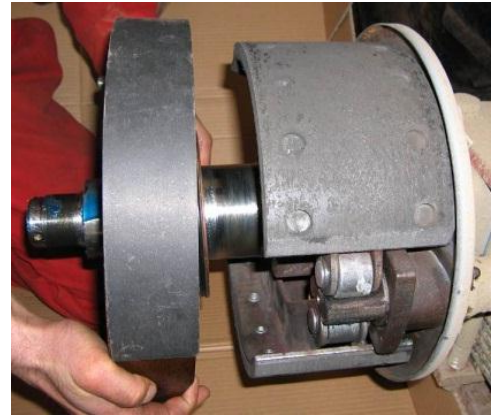
You should strongly consider asking for a brake performance certificate to prove that the trailer has well-functioning brakes before you buy or hire.

Brake comparison

The picture on the right shows a standard agricultural foundation brake next to a standard commercial foundation brake.

The difference in surface area between the agricultural spec brake on the left and the commercial spec brake on the right is clear.

Remember though, brakes are only as good as the maintenance they get and like all machinery, they need regular adjustment to carry on performing well.



Tyres and wheels

- Must be of the correct speed rating and condition for the application they are being put to.
- Your dealer should be able to supply you with advice on the correct tyre specification and pressures.
- Steering rear axles will reduce tyre wear and improve turning ability, especially on tri-axle trailers.
- A sprung or air suspended axle will give a smoother ride with load sensing fitted.
- Wheel nut security indicators can easily show any wheel nuts that are beginning to loosen.

Hitch

- The maximum legal vertical weight on a tractor pickup hitch is 3t and you should seek assurances that your trailer will not exceed this weight on the hitch when fully loaded to the trailer manufacturer's specifications.
- The standard pickup hitch hook design can result in wear to both the hook of the tractor and towing eye of the trailer which can result in trailer disconnection if not maintained and replaced.
- Switching to ball and spoon hitches can reduce the play and wear between hitch and eye and eliminate
- the shunting effect you can get with standard hook designs.
- Swivelling rather than fixed trailer towing eyes may help avoid tractor turnover in the event of an accident.

Lighting

- Try to be as visible as possible to other road users.
- Use secondary rear lights higher on the rear of the trailer to better warn all following traffic of manoeuvres.
- Use secondary flashing beacons, especially on high trailers so that a warning beacon is visible from all angles.

Load security

- Ensure the trailer has sufficient hooking for straps to secure the load.
- If you'll need to sheet loads regularly, make sure the sheeting system is robust and easy to use, ideally
- without you having to stand on the trailer to sheet the load.
- Good inspection ladders will make checking any loads safer and easier.

Other considerations

- ABS will only work on the trailer if the tractor is fitted with the right ISO connector plug to operate it.
- Hydraulic tailgates will speed up your operation and improve safety by reducing the number of times you need to leave the cab.
- Reversing cameras can aid visibility in the yard, particularly for large trailers and are inexpensive to install.
- Your dealer should be able to give you good advice on all of these topics to ensure you get the correct equipment for your needs, and are shown how to maintain it. If they can't – shop around!

This advice has been prepared by **NFU** and **BAGMA**, together representing farmers and growers in England and Wales and agricultural dealers in the UK.

Contact **NFU CallFirst** on **0870 8458458** for legal advice on buying equipment.



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The voice of British farming

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