

40-12-248



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December 28, 2004

TO: ALL LICENSE PLATE ISSUING OFFICIALS

FROM: Johnny L. Newman, Assistant Division Director  
Motor Vehicle Division

RE: Farm License Plates Issued to SUVs

Recently, there have been numerous reports of law enforcement issuing tickets to the operators of Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) for incorrectly displaying farm truck license plates (F1-F3). This memo serves to clarify that farm truck plates should not be issued to SUVs, in that, SUVs are not considered to be trucks for registration purposes.

In reviewing the definitions of **truck** and **private passenger automobile** as found in Code of Ala. 1975, Section 40-12-240, the Department considers the controlling criteria to be the designed use of the vehicle. Manufacturers have designed SUVs primarily to transport passengers; accordingly, a **SUV must be considered an automobile**.

Since a SUV displaying a **farm truck license plate** is improperly registered, the owner may return the farm license plate to the issuing official and request a passenger license plate. The issuing official can issue a corrected registration receipt and refund the difference in registration fees. Once the passenger plate is obtained, the SUV may be used to tow a boat trailer, travel trailer, farm trailer, etc., regardless of the combination weight.

Recently a survey was taken of the surrounding states to determine how SUVs are registered. In all four states, **SUVs are considered to be automobiles**. Thus, it is not anticipated that SUV operators will experience any law enforcement problems using passenger license plates when traveling into other states.