

# DRIVER QUALIFICATIONS

FOR ILLINOIS FARMERS



## Commercial Drivers License (CDL)

### Commercial Motor Vehicle

[\[625 ILCS 5/6-500\]](#) & [\[49 CFR 383.5\]](#)

With some exceptions, a CDL must be obtained by the driver of any of the following vehicles:

- Any **combination** of vehicles with a Gross Combination Weight Rating (GCWR) of 26,001 or more pounds, providing the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) of the vehicle being towed is in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- Any **single** vehicle with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds, or any such vehicle towing another not in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- Any vehicle regardless of size, designed to transport **16 or more persons**, including the driver.
- Any vehicle required by federal regulations to be **placarded** for transporting hazardous materials.

*[Note: This 26,001 pound threshold differs from the 10,001 pound threshold used for the Medical Card requirement.]*

### Farm Exemption [\[625 ILCS 5/6-507\(c\)\]](#)

CDLs are not required to operate vehicles (other than semis\*) which are:

- Controlled and operated by a farmer, a member of the farmer's family or an employee;
- Used to transport farm products, equipment or supplies to or from a farm  
*(including nurseries and aquaculture farms);*
- Not operated in for-hire carriage;
- Used within 150 air miles of the farm  
*(in-state or out-of-state);* and
- Used in nursery or agricultural operations.

### \*Farm Semi

In addition to the five conditions listed above, farm semi operators must also meet these four additional conditions in order to be eligible for an exemption

from having to obtain a CDL. *(Since all tests and penalties are the same as the CDL, the only benefit in obtaining this "Non-CDL Farm Semi Drivers License" is an exemption from the requirement to submit to drug and alcohol screening.)*

- Semi must be "farm" plated;
- Driver must be age 21 or older;
- Semi is not operated outside of Illinois; and
- "Employee" must be a family member *(parent, spouse, sibling, or child – in blood or in law.)*

### Classification

Whether operating with a CDL or a Non-CDL, drivers must have a properly-classified driver's license for the vehicle size and type they are operating.

- **Class A** – Combination vehicles, 26,001 pounds or more GCWR, providing the GVWR of the vehicle being towed is in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- **Class B** – Single vehicle with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds, or any such vehicle towing another not in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- **Class C** – Single vehicle with a GVWR or at least 16,001 pounds but less than 26,001 pounds.
- **Class D** – Single vehicle with a GVWR of less than 16,001 pounds.

### Endorsements

Special testing is also done for drivers required to have a CDL if they will be driving a vehicle:

- With double or triple trailers;
- With a tank of 1,000 gallons or more liquid capacity *(capacity, not content—any liquid, even water);*
- Placarded because of the hazardous materials carried *(Requires fingerprinting and background check. Apply at least 90 days early.);* or,
- With capacity for 16 or more passengers.

An air brake **restriction** will also have to be removed through additional testing.

*(Except for the farm semi, these extra tests are not required for non-CDL licenses.)*

# Medical Card

## Requirement [\[49 CFR 391.1\]](#)

Drivers of commercial vehicles generally must undergo a DOT Driver Physical once every two years and carry a card signed by the examining physician indicating he/she is physically qualified to drive a commercial motor vehicle.

With some exceptions, a medical card must be obtained by a driver if they:

- Operate a commercial vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or a gross combination weight rating (GCWR) of 10,001 pounds or more in the furtherance of a commercial enterprise (*includes farming*); or
- Operate a passenger vehicle designed to transport 16 or more passengers, including the driver; or
- Operate any vehicle required by federal regulations to be placarded while transporting hazardous materials.

*[Note: This definition of "Commercial Vehicle" differs from that used for the CDL.]*

## Farm Exemption [\[49 CFR 391.2\(c\)\]](#)

Custom harvesting operations, apian industries and certain farm vehicle drivers operating commercial vehicles may be eligible for an exemption from the requirement to have a bi-annual physical and carry a medical card.

Certain farm vehicle drivers may be exempt if they are operating a single vehicle that is:

- Controlled and operated by a farmer, a member of the farmer's family or an employee;
- Used to transport farm products, equipment or supplies to or from a farm (*including nurseries and aquacultures*);
- Used within 150 air miles of the farm (*Whether in-state or out-of-state*);
- Used in nursery or agricultural operations;
- Not operated in for-hire carriage;
- Not required by federal regulations to be placarded while transporting hazardous materials; and,
- Not an articulated vehicle over 10,000 pounds GCWR. (*Farmers driving articulated vehicles — semis, trucks pulling trailers, and even pickups pulling gooseneck trailers — generally lose this exemption and must carry a valid medical card.*)



# Drug & Alcohol Screening

## Requirement [\[49 CFR 382.103\]](#)

Generally, if a driver is required to have a CDL he/she is also required to submit to drug & alcohol screening.

The screening involves pre-employment, random, post-accident, reasonable suspicion and return-to-duty testing requirements. Several other factors are worthy of note.

- Having a CDL even when not required to does not trigger the screening requirement.
- The employer is responsible for providing the screening program.
- An employer who employs himself/herself as a driver (*as many farmers do*) must comply with both the requirements that apply to employers and the requirements that apply to drivers (employees.)
- Individual drivers must be pooled with a larger group to ensure random selection.

## Farm Exemption [\[49 CFR 382.103\(d\)\]](#)

Drug and alcohol screening is generally not required of drivers who have been exempted from the requirement to have a CDL—even if that farmer has a CDL. (*It is the requirement that the driver have a CDL that triggers drug testing, not merely the coincidence that the driver has that license.*)

### More Information

- Illinois Farm Bureau®  
309-557-3274  
[www.ilfb.org](http://www.ilfb.org)
- Illinois State Police  
217-782-6267  
<http://www.isp.state.il.us/>
- Illinois Department of Transportation  
217-785-1181 (*Medical Card and Drug Testing*)  
<http://www.dot.state.il.us/dobuisns.html>
- Secretary of State  
217-524-1350  
[CDL Study Guide](#)  
—Available at SOS driver facilities—  
(*Commercial Drivers License*)  
<http://www.sos.state.il.us/>

A pdf version of this document is available with hyperlinks at the ilfb web address.