

No-till advantages, drawbacks

[Continued from Page 1] pointed out that there are some drawbacks. To begin with, it won't work on every farm, nor on every type of soil. Furthermore, no-till planting involves cover crops which are used as mulch for weed control. Once killed off with chemicals (another primary factor in making no-till work), the cover-crop acts as a mulch. This mulch will help keep moisture within the soil, but will also serve as

a haven for insects and other pests. Therefore a farmer must be very much aware of his pest problems and a spraying program is essential.

Joe Newcomer, extension agronomist from the University of Maryland, noted that the mulch conserves moisture, but it also holds back the soil warming process in the Spring. Consequently, germination can be delayed ap-

proximately 10 days. No-till planting involves a different style of equipment and this could mean additional expenses if machinery must be purchased or custom-hired. But of the approximately 1,500 people present at the meeting, which featured informative talks, slide presentations and indoor as well as outdoor exhibits, most were familiar and enthused about no-till practices.

Young, for example, believes that no-till has definite advantages and stated that his own records prove that corn can be raised for far less than USDA's official estimates indicate. He added that for him the costs have been shaved down to 98 cents per bushel in some instances.

He also said that no-till planting offers the farmer a wider range of planting dates, including during times when fields would not be fit for conventional planting methods were to be used. Weed control is also better as far as he is concerned because of the effects of the cover crop.

Since the cover crop, usually rye, is such an important factor in no-till planting, the management of this phase is given high priority. It is recommended

that the cover crop be allowed to grow to a height of 18 to 20 inches, at which time it should be sprayed with a herbicide for an "instant kill." The crop is left there as a mulch. Planting should be at about this time, and a residual spray should be applied to prevent weeds from coming up later.

The idea of no-till planting has been around for centuries in one form or another, but it has only been about 15 years since the practice was picked up by modern agronomists and farmers. Most of the early development came from farmers themselves who tried to save time, fuel, money, and labor. Their innovations and home-made planters were eventually picked up by major equipment manufacturers for refinement and mass production, and the idea has been spreading rapidly ever since. This new technology has also spurred the chemical industry since successful no-till depends on chemicals.

Lime is very important in any well-balanced soil nutrition program, and no-till planting is no exception, the farmers were told. Some concern had been expressed about the application and efficient use of fertilizer, but

according to the experts and users of no-till, that's no real problem. The fertilizer doesn't move down through the soil as quickly, but it does reach the plant, someone reassured the group. There was one valid concern however - and one which was acknowledged by those who have been practicing no-till for a number of years.

Soil compaction will take place in certain soils and they will therefore have to be re-worked from time to time, either with a conventional or chisel plow.

While most of the 1,500 persons present at the day-long meeting were familiar with no-till, it is a relatively new technique. Simply defined, no-till planting is placing seeds into a narrow opening in the ground. The opening is made by a specially equipped planter which eliminates the need for plowing and-or disking. It may sound simple, but it's not.

Some farmers have reported problems in getting the seed to touch the soil. The problem? When the coulters slice the soil into which the seed is supposed to drop, they press the mulch into the opening and form a "bed" on which the kernels drop. Planting depth is another critical factor which has caused some difficulty. Experts warn that seeds should not be placed more than two inches into the ground. A trailing press wheel is desirable in helping to overcome problems.

While still in the growing stage, machinery manufacturers and farmers are continuing to come up with innovations which are intended to make no-till more efficient. Adapting the no-till planter for hillside planting is one area of research. Some farmers have gone over to ground-driven sprayers, claiming that they are safer and more accurate.

In spite of some of its drawbacks, no-till planting is considered to be a valuable soil management practice. It enhances possibilities for double-cropping and reduces planting costs. It's a soil and moisture saver and favored by conservationists. All in all, it's considered to be an economical and environmentally sound practice by those who have experimented with no-till.

The displays at the convention centered around no-till planters and sprayers as well as pesticides, herbicides, applicators, pumps, and specialized equipment.

Order 2 price released

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The butterfat differential was 11.9 cents for each tenth of a pound of fat above or below 3.5 percent.

Receipts from dairy producers totaled 754,087,802 pounds, 1.3 percent of 9,426,690 pounds more than in December 1974, Mr. Wilson reported. Handlers utilized 409,014,864 pounds of these receipts or 54.2 percent for fluid milk products (Class I). In December 1974 the Class I utilization percentage was 52.9. For December 1975, handlers paid \$11.00 for Class I milk compared with \$9.22 a year ago.

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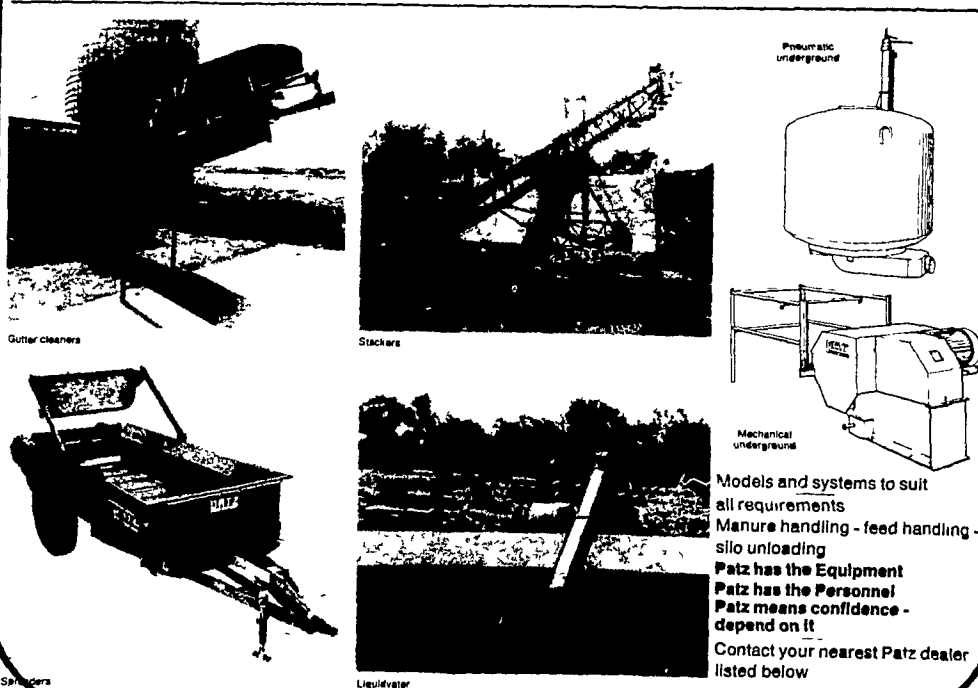
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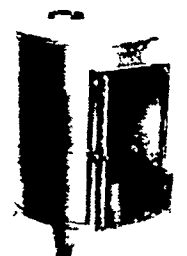
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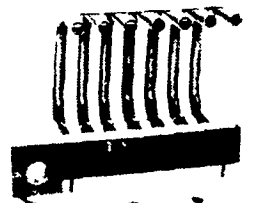
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