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No-till covering more ground

Editor's Note: The following brief history and description of no-till is submitted by William G. McIntyre, senior Hunterdon County agricultural agent, New Jersey.

The latest issue of Agricultural Research put out by our U.S. Department of Agriculture has an interesting commentary on modern agriculture. They point out that the venerable plow is steadily yielding ground to a more modern way of farming; minimum tillage and related methods. Indeed, a USDA study predicts that by the year 2010, American farmers will practice conventional tillage methods only about five percent of our crop land.

Minimum tillage techniques gained initial impetus after World War II as farmers began feeling the

pinch of chronic labor shortages. In an effort to complete planting on time, enterprising farmers began learning how to save time and labor by planting row crops in narrow strips of soil cut open by a coulter blade or a chisel. Today's minimum tillage or "no till" farmer, plants a winter cover crop, typically rye, after the fall harvest. In the spring he kills the rye with herbicides, then seeds the main crop into the resultant mulch with a special planter. Not a furrow is turned, nor does the farmer need to re-enter the field until harvest time when the cycle begins anew. USDA reports that plow-less farming is now underway on more than six million acres in this country and it is expanding rapidly. Minimum tillage methods are not without their

problems, however. Insects, once held in check by deep plowing, thrive in the undisturbed soil and the mulch. Farmers who fail to anticipate this problem and to select the proper insecticides court disaster. The necessary herbicide application must be made on a precisely timed basis to establish enough mulch to check the erosion, yet not smother the seedlings.

Science will help remedy these and some other problems related to minimum tillage farming, the concept recently cited as a "truly basic change in the history of agriculture." "No-till" unquestionably saves farmers time, labor, and money. Its long term

benefits however, may well lie not in farm economics, but in conversation. The unturned soil, protected by this layer of mulch can retain fifty percent more soil moisture than a plowed field. In addition it can cut erosion and run off on sloping fields by up to ninety percent.

This is good news in these times of environmental awareness and consequent social constraints. It is indeed an idea whose time has come. Talk to any of our farmers who have really studied the no till corn growing technique and you will know what the USDA folks mean when they say it does save some time and more important it does save soil structure.

Angus judges called

Beef cattle judges interested in participating in the 1976 National Angus Judges Certification program April 24 in Reno, Nevada, have only until April 1 to enroll for the minimum \$35 fee reports Dean Hurlbut, director of activities for the American Angus Association.

The program is open to all persons who are interested in judging Angus breeding cattle shows. Enrollment will not close until just prior to the event, but the fee will be \$45 after April 1.

Judges who qualify in the program will have their names placed on the Certified Angus Judges list and will receive a certification card from the Association good for three years. Judges who last qualified at the event in Reno in 1974 will have to be requalified to

remain on the Association list which is circulated to show officials.

The program begins at 7:30 a.m. on April 24 at the Washoe County Fairgrounds. Participants will place 12 classes of breeding cattle and give oral reasons on two classes. The reasons classes will be designated before the judging begins.

Headquarters for the Certification Program is the Holiday Inn of Reno Downtown. This will also be the headquarters for the Western Regional Junior Angus Heifer Show and the Western National Angus Futurity April 25-26-27.

For registration or additional information judges should contact the American Angus Association, 3201 Frederick Blvd., St. Joseph, Missouri 64501.

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