

No-tillage best method to produce corn in Delaware

DOVER, Del. — In spite of its labor and energy-saving features, no-till production of corn and soybeans hasn't always received the vote of confidence it should get in Delaware. This is because

Delaware farmers aren't totally convinced that this tillage system will give them the best yield and profit.

According to University of Delaware Extension agricultural engineer Tom

Williams, there's also been a lot of concern about whether or not soil compaction restricts root growth and reduces yields, especially with no-tillage.

However, there are now

some promising statistics to line up on the side of no-till farming on the Delmarva peninsula, reports Williams.

To help answer the question of which is best, no-till or conventional tillage, for the past three years researchers at the University's agricultural experiment station have been conducting field tests at Neward and Georgetown on both systems for corn and soybean production. The purpose of the tests was to find out how various production methods compared under local soil and weather conditions.

Primary tillage treatments in the test plots included moldboard plow, chisel plow, and no-tillage. Within each treatment, comparisons were also made

between in-row subsoiling and no-sub-soiling. Subsoiling was done under the row 15 inches deep at planting or just prior to planting after secondary tillage was finished.

A comparison of corn yields from each treatment showed that the subsoiled plots yielded significantly less than no-subsoiling in two out of seven tests. In-row subsoiling actually decreased yields by 5.5 per cent over all tests with corn. Tests on full season soybeans showed no significant yield difference between in-row subsoiling and no-subsoiling.

But while subsoiling appeared to be a bust, tests on corn with no-tillage versus chisel plowing on both loamy sand and silt loam soils came out strongly in favor of no-till.

Over the three-year period, no-tillage corn outyielded chisel plowed plots by six per cent (5.2

bushels) on loamy sand and eight per cent (9.5 bushels) on the silt loam. The yield advantage occurred whether or not plots were irrigated.

"These results suggest that no-tillage is the best way to produce corn on most Delaware soils," says Williams. The findings also suggest that in-row subsoiling is of no benefit on a loamy sand soil for producing either corn or full season soybeans in lower Delaware.



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