

# No-till farming: an option that's catching on

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LANCASTER - No-till gained favor with many of our farmers back about eight or nine years ago because of several recognized advantages. One is that the organic matter on top of the soil would serve as a mulch, holding the soil in place, and maintaining soil moisture. Time-saving to a farmer, so essential in the Spring rush, was also considered to be an important advantage.

Harvesting is possible during wet spells, when normally tilled fields could just not support the equipment.

No-till operators are quick to acknowledge no savings in dollars. The cost of initial knock-down of existing vegetation offsets the plowing and harrowing costs. And, management is critical. There's no room for errors. Timeliness is important, the selection of the right herbicides, proper use of no-till planter, all are essential.

With increased concern over energy supplies, the no-till farmer finds himself in a good position to considerably reduce the amount of fuel used in the planting of crops.

Dick Gulick and Art Smith, Rocktown, N.J., were among farmers in attendance at the recent Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference here. Some 1200 farmers from six mid-Atlantic states attended the day-long affair and heard speakers discuss a range of subjects on the no-tillage system.

Gulick and Smith planted

some 350 acres of field corn last year on the land Gulick farms in southern Hunterdon County. And it was all no-till! Much of the corn crop goes into the silos for feeding, the 300 head of Holstein cattle. Some corn is stored as grain for feeding, rest is sold on the market.

He also reports that he had

117 acres of no-till soybeans in this past year and rejuvenated a 26-acre hay field by introducing alfalfa via a no-till procedure.

Though there has been a move in the past few years to minimum-tillage, that is, using a chisel plow, Gulick still finds significant advantages with no-till. Several other farmers in the area, including Bob Fulper, Lambertville, still rely on the no-tillage technique.

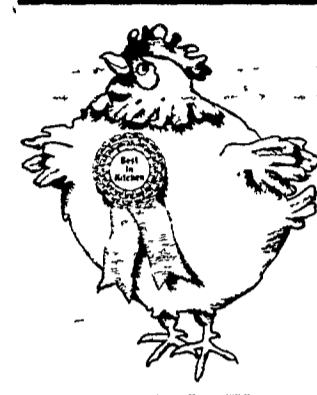
The Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference featured research reports on solar grain drying, a study of herbicide and soil losses from runoff from convention versus no-till systems, some recent research data on no-till seeding of small grains and the introduction of legumes in hay and pasture fields by no-till. An Extension Service economist on the Penn State staff interestingly related his

recommendations for achieving an extra 20 cents per bushel for corn.

And, perhaps the highlight of the day was a panel, "Beating the Weeds in '79." Three successful Pennsylvania farmers joined three Extension Service specialists in describing the procedures and recommendations for weed control in the production of field corn via no-till.

It was a good day, with a lot of good information presented. Perhaps as valuable as the formal program were the informal discussions that took place during the day, at lunch and in conversations in the car traveling to and from.

No-till seems to have found its niche. A practice that we have indicated from the start as being not for everyone, it does fit rather well a number of our farm operations.



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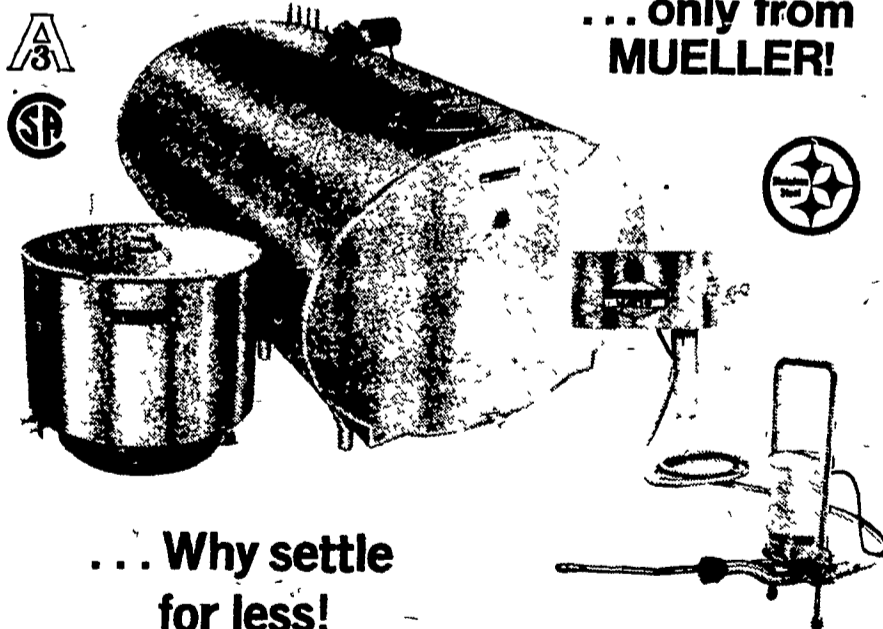
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