

No-till bales out rain plagued Del. farmers

NEWARK, Del. — No-till acreage in Delaware has grown rapidly over the past few years. As the 1980 season winds along, it looks like more and more farmers will

be planting their corn and soybeans this way. There are several reasons for the rising popularity of no-till, says University of Delaware extension crops

specialist Frank Webb. Fuel prices are way up compared to previous years. Time and labor are worth much more, too. And no-tillage gives you savings on all three counts.

Farmers trading in or buying new machinery are also attracted by the reduced equipment needs of this cultural system, which doesn't require the discs, harrow and other accessories used with the moldboard plow.

With new tractors selling for between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and accessories for them going \$10,000 to \$25,000, this is something to think about.

One of the big advantages of no-till is that it saves time. And timing is especially important this year because it's been a very wet spring.

"Everything is backed up because of all the rain we had at the end of April," notes Webb.

With the pressure to get corn in and prepare the ground for soybeans, lots of farmers may have made some last-minute shifts to no-till, just to get everything

done. This means some people are trying this system for the first time without having given much thought as to how the switch affects seeding rates, fertilization, and weed control.

Because of all the wet weather, weeds are likely to be a problem in a lot of fields, even with conventionally planted corn. With no-till corn, they pose a much more serious problem, since your regular spray mixture can hurt the corn. Yet all that competing vegetation must be controlled or you won't have much of a crop. So keep a close watch on your fields and if you see a problem developing, get in touch with your county agent immediately for advice on how to handle it.

"They say we learn by our mistakes," notes Webb.

"Troubles like this can be headed off with a bit more planning and preparation. The best setup for no-tillage is to have a sprayer on your tractor and planter rig, or else to have a separate spray tractor following your

planter as closely as possible."

He also expects to see more soybeans going into no-till this year — both double-cropped and full-season beans.

"I would advise anyone going into full-season no-till soybeans for the first time to get in touch with their county agent for the most up-to-date information available on this system," he says.

"It's still a fairly new practice. All the details aren't worked out yet, but we know enough to help you set up a fairly successful program."

Whether you're growing corn or soybeans, some kind of cover crop is essential in all of the no-till systems—for better weed control, moisture retention and increased yield. The existing stubble makes an excellent mulch when planting no-till beans after small grain.

Covers on full-season soybeans and no-till corn can consist of either previous crop residues, or killed winter covers like rye, Austrian winter peas, vetch, or crimson clover. Because

they're legumes, the last three can supply additional nitrogen to fertilize corn plants, besides serving as beneficial mulches.

As energy costs continue to rise, Webb expects no-tillage to become even more widely used in crop production.

He cites comparisons made between this and other tillage practices by University of Delaware extension agricultural engineer Tom Williams and extension agronomist Bill Mitchell. Their findings underline the savings possible with no-till.

They report the moldboard plow is the most energy-intensive of the tillage options open to farmers.

Substituting the chisel plow for the moldboard plow reduces horsepower hours per acre by 24 percent, fuel use by 20 percent, and man hours of labor by 15 percent.

Even better from an energy standpoint is no-tillage, which consumes only 18 percent as much fuel as the moldboard plow system and requires only 30 percent as much labor.

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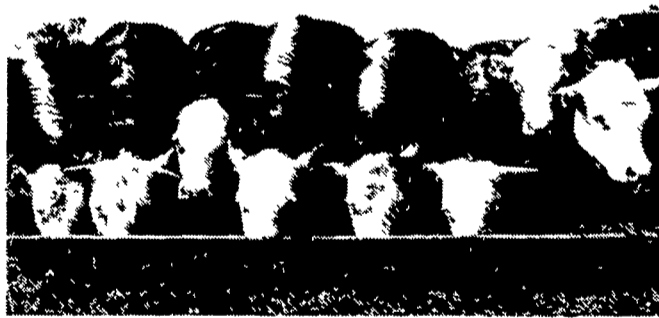
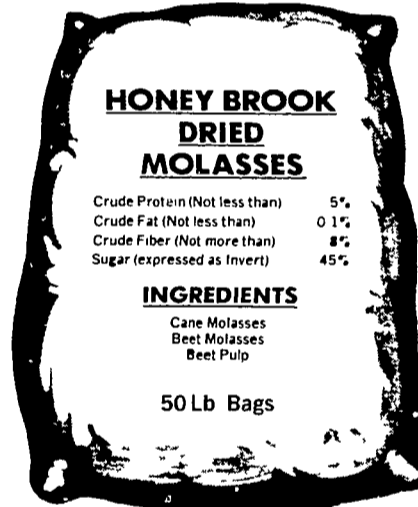
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