

No-till

(Continued from Page D3)

have been extremely helpful in determining the fate of N applied to no-tillage corn. These findings indicated that instead of being leached out of the root zone, much of the fertilizer nitrogen was actually tied up in the organic layer which accumulates at the soil surface under no-tillage.

Some data indicates that under no-tillage, regardless of soil texture, it would be beneficial to delay N application until the demand for N by the corn plant begins to increase, perhaps 5 to 6 weeks after planting or when the corn is 12 to 18 inches tall. But additional research needs to be conducted on this problem.

Nitrogen is the most costly of the major fertilizer nutrients required for crop production and obviously must be utilized efficiently.

Urea, the most concentrated solid N fertilizer available, is rapidly becoming the most important N source in dry blended fertilizers. Urea is also an important constituent of the increasingly popular liquid N solutions.

The advantages of urea are excellent physical (handling and storage) characteristics blends well with other fertilizer materials, and contains more N per pound of material than any other N source except anhydrous ammonia. However, urea has one major disadvantage: When not soil incorporated, there is a relatively high probability that a significant portion of the N may be lost to the atmosphere through ammonia volatilization.

In tests conducted over a 4-year period at three Maryland locations, ammonium nitrate prilled urea granulated urea and 30% UAN solution were compared at four application rates on no-tillage corn. In 5 out of the 12 tests

urea resulted in grain yields significantly lower than those obtained from ammonium nitrate. Also in another 5 of the 12 tests, 30% UAN was inferior to ammonium nitrate, but usually superior to urea.

When urea was soil incorporated, research has demonstrated that apparent gaseous ammonia losses were not a problem. More efficient use of urea on no-tillage corn can apparently be obtained by injecting the urea several inches beneath the soil surface with a special applicator.

Similar benefits have been observed with N solutions when injected beneath the soil surface, or when surface applied in a solid stream as opposed to a more conventional fine spray.

In an effort to reduce ammonia losses from surface applied urea and UAN solutions, several N materials were compared either broadcast or injected (5" to 6" deep) at the Poplar Hill Research Farm near Salisbury in 1979. Similar tests were conducted in 1980. The results were not consistent but nevertheless encouraging.

Placing the nitrogen beneath the soil surface significantly improved corn grain yields in 1979 and 1980. In other tests it has frequently been observed that dribbling N solutions between the rows resulted in higher yields than if the UAN solution had been broadcast in a uniform spray.

Another important aspect of fertilizing no-tillage corn is the development of excess acidity near the soil surface. This can be a serious problem since under the no-tillage concept all of the N fertilizer is applied to the soil surface.

Soil samples taken from near the surface usually have a much lower pH than those taken from the entire plow layer. Therefore it is extremely important that soil samples be taken from the proper depth in no-tillage

fields to reflect this surface soil acidity.

Weed control in no-tillage corn has often been poor. Research at Penn State showed that often the important triazine herbicides such as atrazine and simazine, were de-activated by low soil pH.

It was soon found that although pH levels of soil samples taken from the entire plow layer appeared to be satisfactory for corn, the pH at the soil surface was often much lower, due apparently to the surface application of acid fertilizers, particularly nitrogen.

Soil samples taken from several depths indicated there was no significant difference in soil pH between the 0 to 1 and the 0 to 2 inch soil samples. However, there was often a significant pH difference between the average of the two samples taken near the surface and the sample taken from the 0 to 8 inch depth. The latter plow layer sample even though it generally demonstrated a lower soil pH as the nitrogen rate was increased did not adequately measure surface soil pH.

To compensate for this problem, Bandel recommends two soil samples be taken from no-tillage fields — one from the 0 to 2 inch depth for pH and lime recommendations and another sample from the 0 to 8 inch depth for phosphorus and potassium soil test and recommendations. The plow depth sample should not be used to estimate lime needs in no-tillage fields.

A no-tillage field that should be tested by the two-soil sample method is defined as any field that has not been moldboard plowed for at least one year and has received lime and/or fertilizer broadcast on the surface during that period. Fields chisel plowed and/or disked during this period should also be treated as no-tillage for soil sampling since neither of these operations significantly

incorporates surface applied fertilizers.

In summary, it appears that for more efficient utilization of N fertilizers by

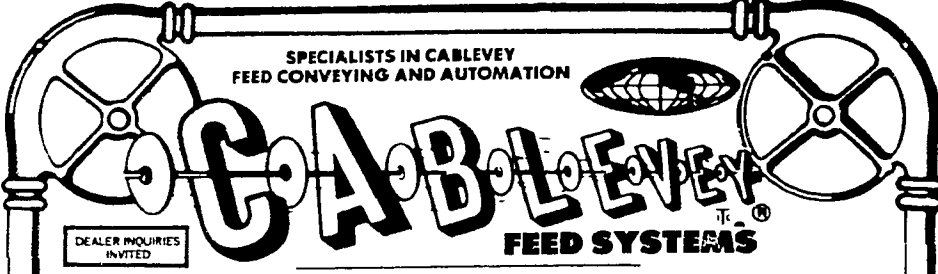
no-tillage corn

—N application rates may be similar for no-tillage as well as for conventional tillage corn. However, since

no-tillage has a higher yield potential than conventional tillage corn at optimal N rates, it would be justifiable

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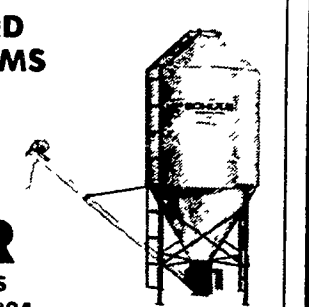
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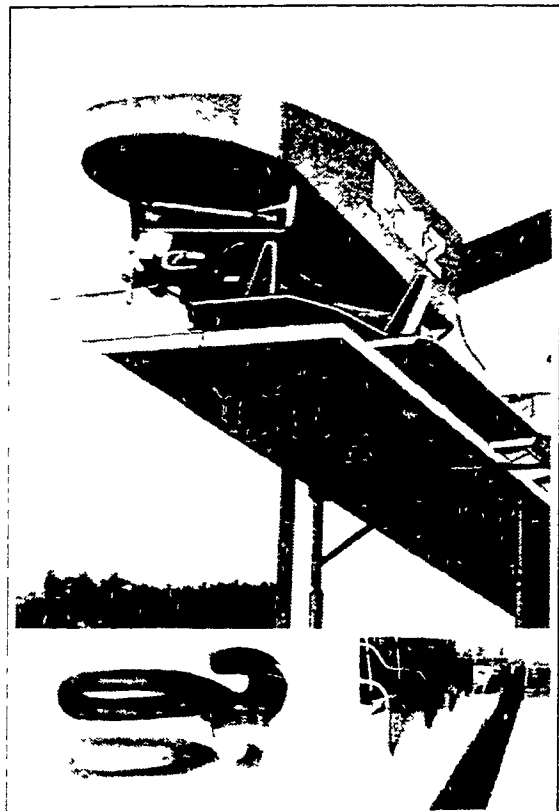
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