

Select hybrids to meet tillage needs

WESTPORT, Ct. — Everywhere the major topic of conservation in corn production, other than price, is tillage. Specifically, conservation tillage practices. Farmers, landowners, and farm managers have become acutely aware of the need to save our soil for future generations. Protecting precious topsoil from wind and

water erosion, then, is what conservation tillage is all about.

There have been many articles written and research completed on fertility, and weed, insect and disease control programs for conservation tillage. These programs are important to keep production with conservation tillage competitive with con-

ventional tillage, and each will differ widely between the two practices. However, very little has been written on one of the most important aspects of corn production — the relationship of conservation tillage to hybrid selection.

For a farmer to choose hybrids wisely, he has to know the dif-

ference between conservation and conventional tillage.

Conservation tillage attempts to control erosion by keeping as much of the residue of the previous crop on the soil surface as possible. On the other hand, conventional practices cover this residue to leave a cleanly plowed field. While a conservation tillage farmer will plant crops with as few trips across the field as possible, his conventional tillage counterpart will plant crops only when a near-perfect seedbed is attained — no matter how many swings across the field are needed.

These differences grow in importance for Illinois farmers selecting hybrids. Because of the residue on the soil surface, the soil will warm more slowly than cleanly plowed acreage. Additionally, with conservation tillage, seedbed preparation is often less than ideal. To counter these two conditions, hybrids must have very strong emergence and early vigor.

Root growth of corn plants is generally less with conservation tillage because of less seedbed preparation. With that in mind, a farmer should select a hybrid with an extensive, vigorous root

system. Such a root system is needed to aid in water and nutrient uptake, as well as standability.

Because the previous crop's residue remains on the soil surface, potentially more disease organisms and insect larvae will over-winter. A hybrid for conservation tillage must be tolerant to this increased exposure to disease and insects, particularly European corn borer.

How does a farmer find out which hybrids meet the criteria for excellent production with conservation tillage? In addition to drawing on experience with hybrids he is now using, a farmer can rely on extension service plot results from counties where conservation tillage is widespread. He can also turn to experienced seedsmen who have access to industry and university plot results, and who know the kinds of yields local farmers using conservation tillage are getting.

The need to save our soil for future generations must, of course, be balanced with our immediate need for food and profit. Through conservation tillage and proper hybrid selection, farmers across the country can attain that balance.

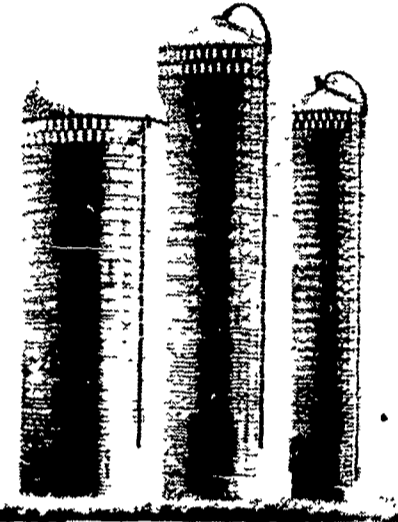
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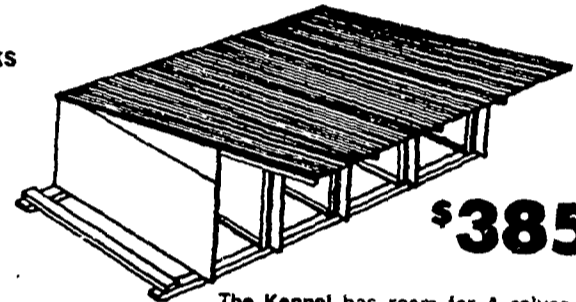
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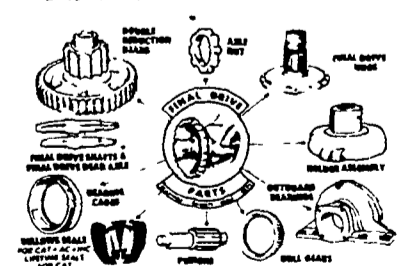


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