

# Think in terms of overall crop management

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — Will reduced tillage - or even none at all - on your corn ground this fall limit

soybean stand quality next spring? Experienced growers and researchers answer with a

resounding "No!" But before you jump on - or off - your tractor to change tillage

practices, be aware you'll likely have to change other areas in your crop production program too, notes Tom Colvin, agricultural engineer with the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Iowa State University (ISU).

declares Don Erbach, another USDA ag engineer at ISU, "except under certain conditions, such as poorly drained or highly compacted soils.

"Most of the time it seems tillage actually ends up being done to control weeds and to make the planter work better. And I'm not so sure the plant responds that much to tillage," he adds. "Test after test shows that when weeds are controlled, soybeans respond excellently to no tillage at all."

In an article in the November issue of *Soybean Digest*, a publication of the American Soybean Association, Colvin advises farmers to think in terms of overall crop management program, not just specific tillage practices. Key areas: planting, stand, weed control, fertilizer, cultivation, variety selection and pest control.

To help soybean farmers sort through their options, several Midwest crop production specialists offer their comments.

"I have yet to see that tillage clearly does something that is really all that necessary,"

Other specialists agree. "We can plant soybeans directly in 180-bushel corn stubble and get a stand comparable to that in a moldboard plowed seedbed," says Marvin Swearingin, Purdue University agronomist, "without any chopping or tillage - so why do it?"

Gyles Randall, University of Minnesota soil scientist, reports

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## Pa. conservation commitment increases

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania farmers are increasing their commitment to soil conservation in spite of a tight agricultural economy, reports James Olson, State Conservationist for the USDA, Soil Conservation Service (SCS).

Olson added that new ways of reducing soil erosion have been developed in this decade and are proving popular with farmers. He predicted an increase in land protected against erosion in the present decade.

SCS reports show that adoption of conservation tillage by farmers has more than tripled in the past three years — from 18,000 new acres in 1981 to 57,000 new acres this year.

Annually, over one-half million acres of Pennsylvania cropland are planted by no-till or other conservation tillage methods. Conservation tillage is the planting of a crop in the surface residue of the preceding crop and includes no-till farming and chisel plowing. It can decrease soil erosion by up to 80 percent with proper soil surface residue.

"The effectiveness, time saving, and low cost of this practice are responsible for its popularity with farmers," said Olson.

Animal waste management systems are another new conservation effort. In 1978, SCS assisted 58 farmers in implementing waste management systems; in 1983, they assisted 318.

Farmers, mainly in southeastern Pennsylvania, are accepting tile outlet storage terraces in increasing numbers. Over 164,000 feet were built in 1981. This year the footage increased to 350,000 feet. This practice permits farming of all the land. The older system of waterways and diversions requires these practices to be kept in a grass cover. However, diversions remain a key structure in controlling hillside erosion in much of the State as documented by the 667,000 feet constructed last year.

Structures for water control such as drop inlets increased from 177 in 1979 to 531 in 1983. This is a further indicator of increasing farmer interests in soil and water conservation.

Olson indicated that the "old reliable" soil conservation practices such as conservation cropping systems, contour stripcropping,

and diversions have remained constant in amounts established over the past decade.

"This record is significant," said Olson. "Farmers are in rough economic conditions but their investment in soil conservation is increasing. This means a good future for Pennsylvania agriculture and better water quality in our streams and

lakes."

"Also significant is the fact that conservation practices established in 1983 reduced soil erosion in Pennsylvania by over one million tons. However, when one realizes that this progress is less than one percent of the need, you know we have a long way to go," summarized Olson.

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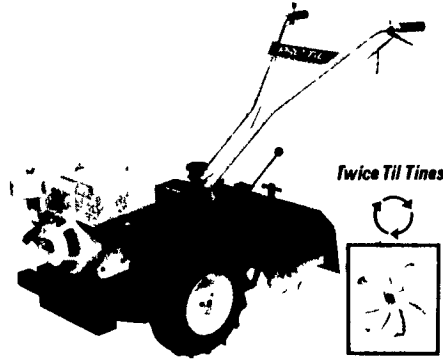
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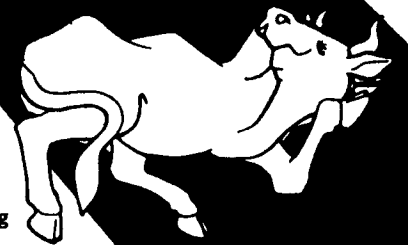
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