



Farm Talk

by
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above all, it worked. There are places where many of the forms of conservation tillage aren't very practical, but here on the Delmarva peninsula soil and cropping conditions seem to be just right. So one farmer would try it and tell another, and he would try it and it spread very quickly from one end of the peninsula to the other. And by the early 80s, there was hardly a farmer who hadn't at least tried some kind of minimum tillage and not many who weren't practicing it, at least in a limited way.

Some farmers went whole hog. After a year or two of experimenting, they sold their plows, bought no-till planters and drills and parked their cultivators. Others moved more slowly to the point where virtually all of their acres are now involved in some form of conservation tillage.

The paybacks aren't great. Sure there's an energy saving and in some cases slightly better yields. There are also added expenses — more chemicals, new and more expensive planters and perhaps bigger tractors. And yet it seems to suit the style of most Delmarva farmers. They can get their crops planted quicker, cover more acres, doublecrop where before it wasn't practical. And the bottom line, as they say, is a better profit picture.

The long-range payoff, however,

may not be as obvious when looking at a profit and loss statement. Farmers are doing something for their ground that they were unwilling or unable to do before. They're actually improving it. Not only is soil erosion in its many forms reduced, but the soil structure is actually being improved, water-holding capacity increased and the general feel of the soil much better. That is truly important when you think a few decades ahead to a time when those conservation tilled acres will be needed for all-out food production once again.

It's really nice when a technology comes along that helps farmers make money and at the same time serves an even higher purpose. Conservation tillage is just that. Farmers like it because it works for them. Society likes it because it saves the soil. And best of all, it hasn't required any

government programs, bureaucratic boondoggling, or political rhetoric to make it happen.

Conservation tillage is a classic example of what can be done when farmers, researchers, extension workers, educators, industry representatives, the whole agricultural complex starts to rally around a concept. A lot of bits and pieces are fitted together to create a working system. Chemicals are developed to control insects and diseases. Production systems are researched and tested, and information exchanges go on among farmers and others that enabled the state of the art to move ahead.

Conservation tillage is still sweeping the country. There's hardly a state where it isn't an important crop production technique. It just so happens that Delaware is ahead of them all.

Delaware farmers have achieved an important distinction. They are number one in conservation tillage. Information released by the Soil Conservation Service puts Delaware at the top percentagewise in the number of crop acres utilizing some form of minimum tillage. Maryland is No. 2 on that same list.

To be number one in any phase of agricultural production is important, but to be first in the adoption of techniques that reduce erosion and improve the soil is quite an accomplishment. Minimum till, no-till and all those other phrases that describe the many forms of conservation tillage were virtually unheard of a couple of decades ago. And then for a variety of reasons, farmers started trying some of the new technology and the rush was on.

It would be nice to honor one individual as the father of no-till farming on the Delmarva peninsula, but it's not that simple. No


one farmer can say he started it, nor can a researcher, extension worker, industry rep, or anyone else claim the credit. Conservation tillage in some of its forms has been around for a hundred years, but only in the last two or three decades has there been a concentrated effort to pull the best information together and then spread the word.

Most of the early information on conservation tillage in these parts was borrowed from Kentucky. Researchers and extension workers at the University of Delaware started experimenting in the late 60s and early 70s. Innovative farmers were reading in the farm magazines about this new technology, and some of them were starting to give it a try. The whole thing just sort of snowballed. The technology was available and the reasons for using it, primarily energy saving, appeared at a time when a lot of farmers were in a mood to make the change. And,


Chester contacts continue

WEST CHESTER — Farmers within the Octoraro Creek Watershed in Chester County who have requested conservation plans through the Chester County Conservation District will continue to be contacted during March by Soil Conservationists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) office in West Chester.

The SCS conservationists will be arranging meetings with individual farmers to help the farmers develop conservation plans on their farms. Cost-share funds for implementation of conservation plans may be available through the U.S.D.A.'s Agriculture Conservation and Stabilization Service (ASCS).



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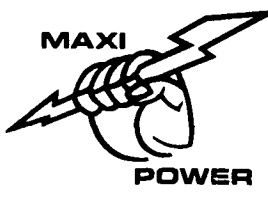
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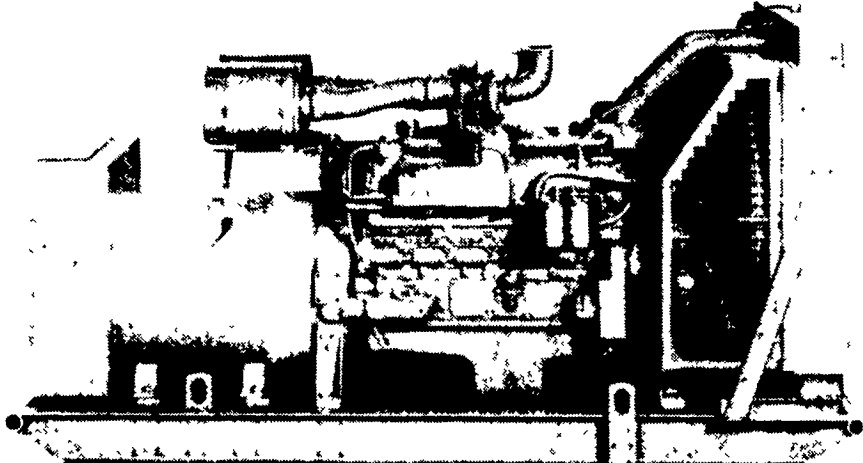


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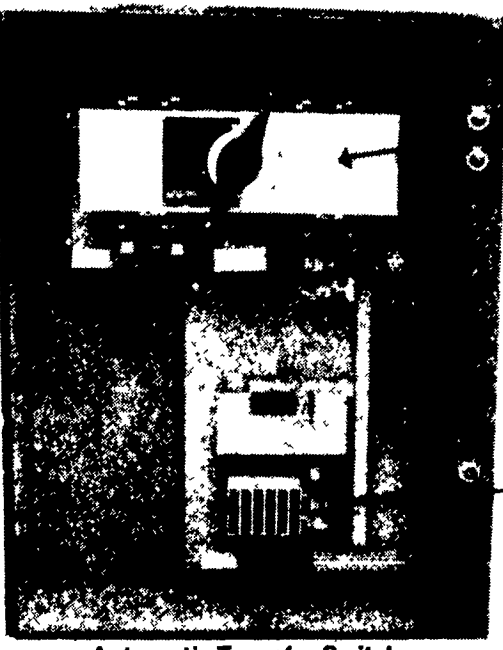
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