

Herb Myer plows new ground in tillage field

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ground for the past decade.

Although the idea hasn't been embraced by the farming community as yet, Myer insists that he wouldn't have stayed with it for so long if it hadn't produced what he feels are dramatic results.

Just what has slit tillage done for Myer? In addition to being a time saver, the system has practically eliminated erosion while improving his soil's texture. And Myer claims that he's saved money while accomplishing all this.

To get the job done, Myer uses a modified Brillion chisel plow. About a dozen years ago, when he bought the unit, he removed half

the teeth and replaced the curved chisel shovels on the remaining five shanks with narrow, two-inch teeth. He then fitted a heavy-duty disk coultter in front of the unit that serves to guide the teeth and cut up surface residue. The modified unit cuts five slits in the soil 30 inches apart and about 12 to 15 inches deep. Between each pair of slits a low ridge is formed by the soil that is thrown to the side by the chisel teeth.

After harvesting his corn, Myer pulls the chisel through the field so that each tooth cuts a slit between corn rows. The soil is not disturbed until planting time, when a light disk or harrow is used to round off

the ridges created by the chisel. The result is a field of low, undulating ridges between the slits that have become partially filled with soil and crop residue.

Myer then plants his corn with a no-till planter. Although he tries to keep his corn rows basically on top of the ridges, no harm is done if some of the seed winds up in the slits.

Myer points out that it's easy to see why slit tillage is more effective in stopping erosion and runoff than either conventional plowing and disking or no-till planting. Using traditional tillage methods, loose soil is tilled on top of packed soil. This loose surface

is particularly vulnerable to sheet erosion during heavy rains. And while no-till planting does reduce soil loss, the packed surface does little to keep water from heading downhill.

On the other hand, slit tillage incorporates the best of both worlds—a few inches of loose soil on either side of the slit, and packed soil in between. And once rain water hits the low ridge crests between the slits, it can travel no more than 15 inches in either direction before coming to a slit. Once it flows into a slit, the water is exposed to a large amount of surface area along the walls on either side. The result is that water never has the opportunity to build up enough speed to wash soil, and all water is absorbed in the vicinity of where it originally fell.

Myer claims that the slits are so effective at halting the movement of water across the surface that he can haul manure all winter without fear of it washing away. He does acknowledge that the slits' ef-

fectiveness may be reduced somewhat with time's passage. The openings gradually become filled with soil and organic matter, and the light disking at planting time also helps to fill them in. "But I wouldn't be afraid to get 10 inches of rain right after I put them in," he says.

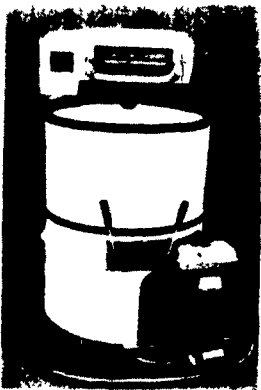
"The main reason I did it was to prevent erosion," says the Lampeter-area farmer, who maintains that not a single erosion gully has appeared on his four to eight-degree slopes since he started using slit tillage. He's also pleased to report that slit tillage results in fuel savings and less wear and tear on equipment, since his modified chisel has only half of its original shanks cleaving the ground.

As the years passed, though, Myer began to notice yet another apparent benefit: the texture of his soil was improving. He reasons that since the narrow chisel teeth bring very little soil to the surface, subsoil is not mixed with topsoil.

As a young farmer, Myer explains, he was taught to bring up a small amount of subsoil, or clay, when plowing. The problem with

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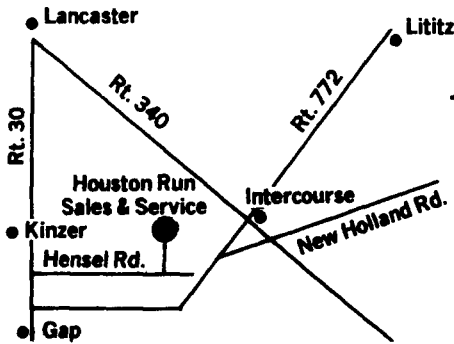
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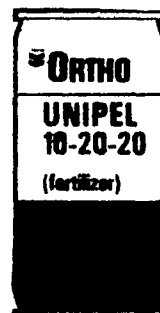
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