

Conservation Tillage Benefits Wildlife

LEESPORT — Dwindling small game populations in areas that use intensive crop tillage may be reversed as the adoption of conservation tillage continues to spread. Conservation tillage, and, in particular, the no-till practice, is the planting of crops in the residue of the previous crop.

Conservation tillage is rapidly gaining acceptance, says District Conservationist, Duane Pysker of the Soil Conservation Service.

Thirty percent of America's row crops are now planted under some form of conservation tillage. The USDA predicts that by the year 2000, more than 80 percent of America's farmers will have adopted some type of conservation tillage system. The Corn Belt and Great Lakes States lead the Nation in total acreage.

Research on the benefits of conservation tillage and its relation to wildlife are ongoing

throughout the country. In Indiana, a cooperative study between the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the USDA's Soil Conservation Service is examining the effects of no-till farming on the wildlife population in that state.

A three-year field study is gathering information on the technical aspects of conservation

tillage, effects of no-till farming on small bird and mammal populations, and the influence of nitrogen-fixing cover crops. Biologists are concentrating their efforts on such species as bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasants, rabbits, and songbirds. Most Indiana wildlife experts believe that the improved wildlife habitat produced by winter cover crops and residue from no-till may hold and produce wildlife in areas where intensive farming had removed suitable habitat and

discouraged wildlife.

The first year's work showed 33 different kinds of birds in the 21 fields being studied. No-till-fields had the largest variety and number of birds.

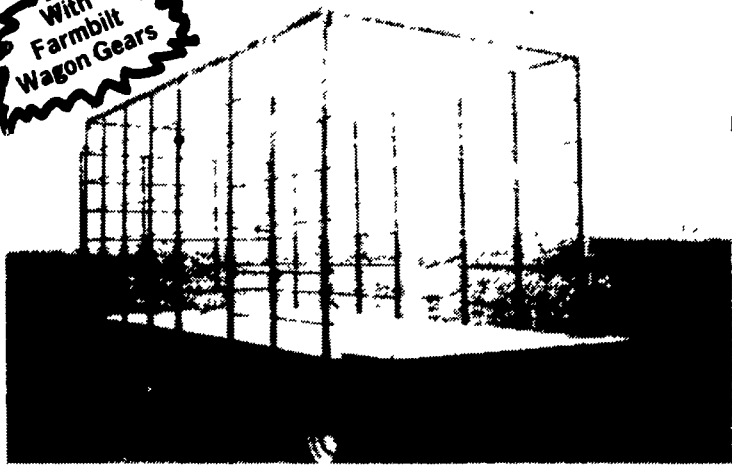
Field data gathered indicated that fall chisel tillage significantly reduces the number of desirable wildlife species about as much as fall moldboard plowing. No-till corn shows the highest winter use by wildlife. Ground nesting species favor no-till fields with cover crops for spring nesting.

Farming methods affect wildlife habitat in many ways. Growing the same crop year and year reduces the diversity of plant cover and the variety of wildlife. Moldboard plowing, the practice which is falling from favor throughout many parts of the county, buries grain and residues that can provide food or cover for wildlife. Overgrazing by domestic livestock also results in less food and cover for wildlife.

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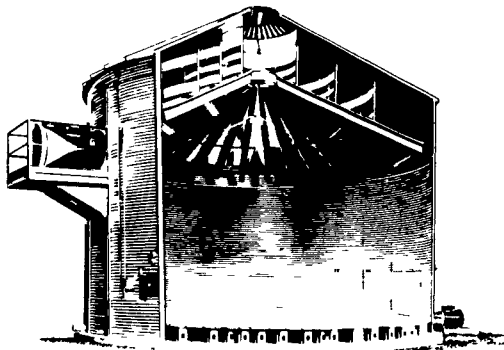
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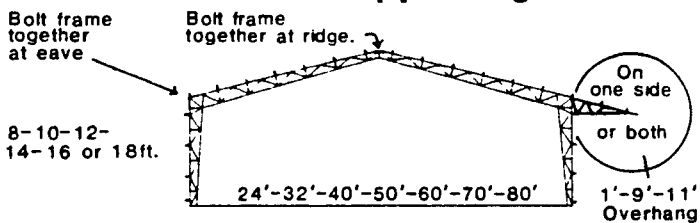
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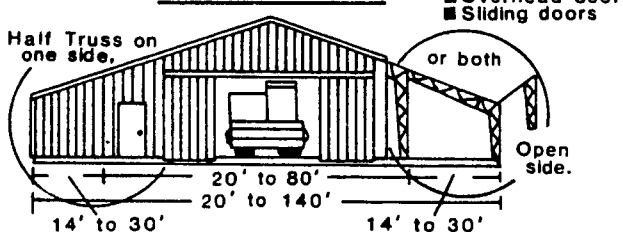
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