

# No-Till Conference

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production costs rather than simply discussing ways to raise yields.

And one of the best ways to reduce production costs is to adopt no-till methods, said Penn State Extension economist Bill Waters.

Using figures gleaned from statewide Corn Club data, Waters compared the economics of conventional tillage with no-till and minimum-tillage methods. One of the most significant cost savings realized from no-till farming was the result of fewer trips across the field. While Corn Club participants logged an average of 4.7 operations on their no-till (NT) fields, minimum-till (MT) and conventional tillage (CT) required 6.6 and 7 operations, respectively. No-till's reduced number of field operations resulted in lower hours

per acre required to produce a crop: NT 2.3; MT 2.9; CT 3.8.

Since fewer field operations result in lower machinery costs, no-till's average machinery costs were slightly more than one-half the costs associated with conventional and minimum tillage.

In the final analysis, the per-bushel cost of getting a bushel of corn from the field to the point of storage was \$1.58 for no-till, \$1.70 for conventional tillage and \$1.74 for minimum tillage. "In labor and net return, no-till is clearly the most cost effective," said Waters.

The conference also feature experts from Virginia, Maryland and Illinois. Harlan White, of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, discussed no-till forage establishment. Seeding forages into sod, behind summer annuals or into small grains can all be

effective techniques if careful attention is paid to establishing a favorable environment for the seedling, he said.

The University of Maryland's Ronald Ritter addressed no-till weed control, noting that the particularly worrisome weeds include the annual grasses, triazine-resistant pigweed and lambsquarters and the deeply rooted perennial weeds such as Johnsongrass and Canada thistle.

An early preplant herbicide application can be particularly important for control of annual grasses during a dry year, he said, since early emerging weeds rob crops of much needed moisture.

Sprayer expert Thomas Reed of Wheaton, Ill., was on hand to introduce farmers to the newest methods for getting chemicals on the field. Closed injection systems may be the wave of the future he said, since chemicals applied this way are not exposed until they come in contact with the intended surfaces.

Discussing corn diseases associated with conservation tillage systems was Penn State plant pathology professor John Ayers. The specialist noted that one of the most common problems to arise in no-till fields is gray leafspot. Characterized by rectangular lesions limited by the corn leaf's veins, gray leafspot "wasn't a problem in the Mid-Atlantic region until we went to leaving debris on the surface," Ayers said. Options available to the farmer for controlling the disease include plowing the debris into the soil, planting resistant hybrids, or rotating to other crops. High levels of triazine herbicides in the soil can limit this latter option, he pointed out.

Other disease problems include northern corn leaf blight, a disease that causes boat-shaped lesions,



Former USDA Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz was the featured speaker at the Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference held on Dec. 17.

and eyespot, characterized by round to oval lesions on the leaves. This latter disease is most evident in northern Pennsylvania and New York, Ayers said.

The program also included a panel discussion featuring John Stoner of Mercersburg, Russell Cassell of Hummelstown and Dan

Baughner of Taneytown, Md. All three farmers rely heavily on no-till methods to produce their grains and forages.

According to conference chairman Lynn Hoffman, about 1,000 farmers and agribusinessmen attended this year's thirteenth conference.



Three farmers discussed the no-till techniques they employ on their home operations during a panel discussion at the no-till conference. From left are Russell Cassell, Dan Baughner and John Stoner.

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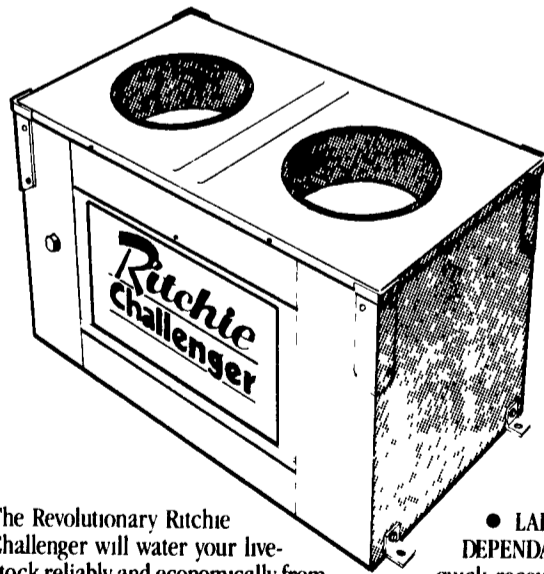
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