

Delaware Farmers Comment On No-Till

NEWARK, Del. — Delaware farmers lead the nation in adoption of no-tillage crop production practices. What do they think of this system after the 1986 drought? How did their no-till plantings do last summer compared to conventionally tilled fields? What are the major problems vexing producers who no-till? What practices do they recommend for improving yields? And what information do they need to do a better job?

For the answers to these and similar questions, last winter University of Delaware extension weed specialist Frank Webb surveyed farmers on the Delaware No-Till Council's mailing list.

"I wanted some input from growers on how they feel about no-till compared to conventional tillage," Webb explained. "There was a lot of dissatisfaction out there because of the drought last summer. Weed control was the primary culprit. It was a dry spring and a lot of our standard herbicide programs didn't work. Dry surface soil conditions reduced no-till corn stands, while no-till, full-season soybeans fared even worse. So no-till really got clobbered."

What did the survey tell him? "The gist of their replies was that Delaware farmers are not discouraged with no-till because of last year." "In general," says Webb, "the problems they experienced because of the drought were common to both no-till and conventional tillage."

Of the 56 growers who responded, 93 percent said they use no-till in their farming operation. And despite concerns voiced last summer, 78 percent of those who used both production practices said their 1986 no-till corn crop did as well or better than their conventional corn. As for production costs, 70 percent said that no-till corn cost the same or less to produce than that grown conventionally.

Weed control was an important concern in no-till corn, according to the survey. Though 96 percent of the growers who answered said they had no trouble obtaining vegetative burn-down before planting, 85 percent did have problems controlling annual grasses last year. Ninety-two percent also had some problems with perennial weeds — especially Canada thistle and horsenettle.

Farmers had more reservations about the present profitability of growing full-season, no-till soybeans. Though 25 percent were satisfied with the system now being used on the Delmarva peninsula, another 38 percent said they wouldn't adopt this practice until better weed control programs become available. "Most of the growers responding said they now own a close-row, no-till planter or a no-till drill," Webb reports, "so equipment is no obstacle to adoption of the system." Despite grower reservations, the survey indicated some farmers intend to increase their full-season, no-till soybean acreage in 1987.

Asked if soil compaction was a problem in their fields, 61 percent

of the no-till corn producers who responded said no, but nearly 40 percent indicated compaction was a concern.

The questionnaire also provided space for farmers to describe their own production practices and steps they have taken to improve no-till yields. Here are some of their comments.

- Grow winter cover crops, harvest barley as haylage before grain sets.
- Use ripper ahead of planter.
- Rotate to no-till corn following no-till, double-crop soybeans.
- Use cover crops and improved selection of no-till chemical combinations.
- Use Surflan on small grains in spring to improve grass control in double-crop soybeans.
- Use early preplant herbicides in corn and planter modifications.
- Increase spray volume up to 50 gallons of carrier per acre for better coverage.
- Try new herbicides and plant soybeans earlier.
- Use a shielded sprayer.
- Improve corn yields by subsoiling in the row ahead of planter.
- Plant with different closing wheels.
- Modernize planter.
- Plow every few years, and disk or chop stalks.
- Switch from flood tips to flat fans on sprayer for much better burn-down.
- Walk the field with a hoe to chop out escaped perennial weeds.
- Split herbicide applications for full-season, no-till soybeans.
- Increase seed rate, slow

ground speed.

- Rotate with (soy)beans as much as possible.
- Preplant spray acreage before planting no-till corn for grass weed control.
- Replace conventional press wheels with steel wheels when planting into a very heavy straw stubble.
- Use new soybean herbicide for improved weed control in no-till soybeans.
- Plow every few years; it improves field conditions and perennial weed control.

Producers were also asked what kind of information they felt would help them do a better job growing no-till crops.

Topics of interest ranged from proper placement of soil insecticides, better seed placement of double-cropped beans in barley,

the effects of soil type on no-till "dollar and cents output," and ways to fight compact soils while continuing a no-till system.

Many growers expressed a desire for more weed control information, including better grass control and broadleaf weed control, low cost weed control for full-season soybeans, and the control of "residual" weeds in no-till soybeans. There were also requests for information on growing no-till or reduced-till vegetables — specifically watermelons, tomatoes, snap beans, limas and peas.

"The fact farmers took the time to write in their responses indicates the level of interest in no-till," Webb says. "Their comments show that, although we have a lot of no-till acreage, we still have a lot of problems to solve."

Grange Week Begins April 19

HARRISBURG — "The Grange is an organization of which we can be extremely proud," said State Master Charles E. Wismer, Jr. of the Pennsylvania State Grange. During the week of April 19-25, Granges across the nation will join in celebration to recognize the achievements, leadership and community betterment which signifies this powerful organization.

Wismer continued, "I am proud that Pennsylvania's membership

is comprised of members who take pride in the Grange tradition. Pennsylvania has a strong membership of over 42,000. With the legislative push and Granges found in rural Pennsylvania which form the backbone of this organization, it is no wonder why our legislative accomplishments are so impressive."

Last year, Pennsylvania State Grange helped to halt the unisex insurance law from going into effect. Other legislative accomplishments in which the Grange played a part include the passage of the pesticide revisions bill, rabies control legislation and a law requiring all school buses to stop at railroad crossings; the list can continue.

Master Wismer travels over 40,000 miles a year to meet with Granges all across Pennsylvania. "This fine representation which spreads across Pennsylvania truly displays the pride which helped build this 115-year-old fraternal organization."

"Each Grange deserves recognition. That is why during the week of April 19th, Pennsylvania, along with the rest of the nation, will recognize this fine organization of men and women—men and women who take pride in rural-America."

Pennsylvania Grange Week will climax with a celebration at the Harrisburg Marriot on Monday, April 27. The banquet will begin with a social hour at 5 p.m. Dinner will be at 6 p.m. All are invited to join in the celebration. Tickets are \$11 and can be ordered by writing The PA State Grange at 1604 N. 2nd St., Harrisburg, PA 17102.

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