

# Raver Made Montgomery County The No-Till Farming Forerunner

BY PAT PURCELL

DICKERSON, MD — In the 1960's something good happened to farming in Montgomery County, Maryland and part of that can be credited to land speculators. Hard to believe that those people who usually buy land only to resell for non-agricultural uses and for a profit could have a positive effect on farming. However, that good thing might not have happened if Bob Raver had not been in Montgomery County.

Bob Raver joined the Montgomery County Cooperative Extension team in 1957 as its dairy and agronomy agent. At that time this thriving agricultural area was already feeling the threat of the encroaching urban sprawl.

In the early sixties in an effort to keep farmers from being forced from their land because of high property taxes, a bill was passed to allow farmers to be assessed on the use of their land and not on the value of their land in the current market. This was a substantial tax break for farmers.

However, this also opened the door to land speculators who purchased thousands of acres each year. But in order to pay the lower, preferred tax rate the land had to be farmed. This farmland was rented to neighboring farmers who put much of the rented land in corn.

"They planted corn continuously on this land. After three or four years of corn production the soil becomes extremely poor and crop yield was very low. It was no longer fertile ground," explained Raver.

Out of this concern Raver visited some research plots in Virginia where no-till farming was being tested.

"While I was down there at a meeting on no-till farming I met Dick Witmer from Chevron. They were the producers of Paraquat. This is a knock-down chemical which made no-till successful. Within two days after spraying it on the plants the foliage turned brown and fell off. This is just what was needed. I invited him to speak to farmers at a meeting in Montgomery County," explained Raver.

## No-Till Comes To Montgomery Co.

In October of 1968 Witmer spoke to Montgomery County farmers. Although they were open to the idea there was not a no-till planter available yet. After searching, Bob learned that Allis-Chalmers, who were the first to produce a no-till planter, had one available. By spring of the following year, Bob had nine farmers signed up to put 175 acres in no-till.

"We rented the planter from a local dealer and factory people came down and demonstrated it to us and explained the technology behind it. Everyone was trading the planter around," said Raver.

"It was difficult that first year to get a good stand. The summer of 1969 was dry, but where it did come up it was beautiful. No-till provides a mulch on the ground that holds the water on the surface and allows it to percolate slowly through the soil. With conventional tilling water just runs right off the top or is lost through vaporization. No-till held the moisture in the ground."

"We got as good or better yields right off the start. After that first year there was probably a half-dozen planters sold. By 1971 we could have rented 20 planters if we would have had them. Farmers

were borrowing planters and planting for each other. All planters were busy."

"In four years time 80 percent of the farmland was in no-till and it reached as high as 90 percent. It has dropped back a little, but there is continuously 85 percent in no-till in the county today," said Raver.

## No-Till Advantages

No-till has many advantages over conventional tillage methods. With little soil disturbance seeds are planted directly into the soil. There is no plowing and this saves the farmer time and a great deal of money in machinery costs. However, probably the most important benefit is in soil conservation. According to Raver, soil erosion in his county was decreased by 90 percent with the no-till methods.

Because of this successful introduction of no-till to Montgomery County farmers, Raver was invited to speak at a no-till convention held in Hawaii. While there he met Harry Young, author of the book "No-Till Farming".

"Harry was growing soybeans

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No-tillage farming is well-adapted for planting on steep, well-drained soils found in these rolling fields in Montgomery County, Maryland. The rye grass planted in the fall creates a lush cover crop amidst the corn stubble.

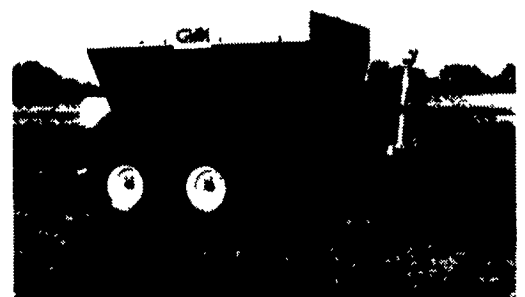
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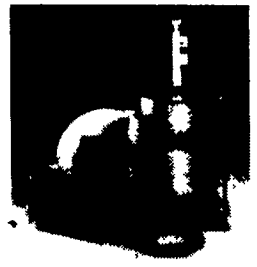
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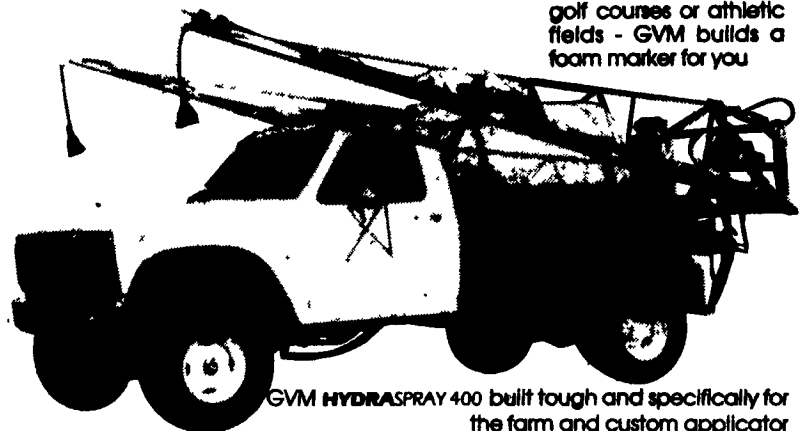


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