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NO-TILL FARMER

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HOW NO-TILL OPENERS AFFECT WEEDS...

Tests conducted for 3 years by the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association indicate angled disc openers result in less soil disturbance and fewer weeds.

Regional soil conservationist Eric Oliver at Swift Current, Saskatchewan, found low soil disturbance doesn't stimulate weeds to break dormancy and start growing. However, a burn-down herbicide is critical for success with the angled discs.

VALUABLE NO-TILL SPRAYING IDEAS...

Four key items came out of a no-till roundtable session on spraying ideas at last winter's National No-Tillage Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. (See page 9 for details on next winter's 10th annual conference).

1. Though expensive, a self-propelled sprayer will quickly pay for itself through timeliness of application and the resulting use of reduced herbicide rates.

2. Drift retardants can widen your window of spraying opportunity while reducing potential damage to neighboring fields.

3. Swathing guidance bars are easily justified with increased herbicide, insecticide and fungicide application accuracy.

4. Light bars also allow you to spray herbicides at night when the wind is often calmer.

BEST NO-TILL CORN STANDS EVER...

With 1,200 acres that are 100 percent no-till, Keith Kemp found his corn stands were much better this year than those of neighbors using conventional tillage and minimum tillage.

The 13-year veteran no-tiller from Manchester, Ohio, says conventional tillers worked the ground early last spring when it was dry. Then cold temperatures with plenty of rain led to serious planting and stand concerns.

"They had uneven stands and only 1-inch-tall corn at the same time our no-tilled corn was 4 to 5 inches tall," he says. "With last spring's weather conditions, no-till really worked for us."

"Better stands and saving on fuel will definitely make us more money this year with no-till."

—Frank Lessiter, Editor/Publisher

NO-TILLING THOSE ALTERNATIVE CROPS...

If you are considering no-tilling alternative crops or new value-added crops, don't think they'll be the answer to overcoming low commodity price concerns.

"Ideally, a farmer should not look at getting into alternative crops or no-till if he already has problems," says Karl Kupers of Harrington, Wash. "It's best to get into it from a perspective of a long-term plan with adequate knowledge, support and trust in what you are doing."

"Weed and disease problems should be eliminated first. You need healthy fields to make direct seeding work."

Kupers no-tills safflower, sunflowers, buckwheat, millet and forage grasses.

"Anyone considering alternative crops needs to do years of advance planning and research," he adds. "They need to have a total commitment to what they are doing. They need to be ready to do a lot more mental management in planning, timing and research."

"There will always be new challenges and you will never stop learning. When trying new crops and different techniques, you won't always be successful. It's a matter of learning as you go along. Look at your failures as test plots."

NITROGEN LOSSES

VS. RAINS... Despite last spring's heavy rains, George Rehm found no substantial loss of fall-applied nitrogen with corn.

These conclusions by the University of Minnesota soil scientist were based on studying soil test results from 19 fields. These fields were located in three areas of the state where soil samples were taken in mid June at depths of 0 to 12 inches and 12 to 14 inches.

There was no substantial nitrogen loss from fields fertilized with either urea or anhydrous ammonia. This was not surprising, notes Rehm, since the soil moisture profile in these areas was empty last fall and could absorb a substantial amount of rainfall before becoming saturated.

NO-TILL COVER CROPS WORK...

George Zeulego says a cover crop following no-till corn produces extra fertilizer and adds organic matter to the soil.

The Danforth, Ill., no-tiller says cover crops add oxygen and carbon dioxide to the soil with no-tilled corn and the rye roots help break up costly soil compaction.

After soybeans, he uses a vetch cover crop to add nitrogen as well as organic matter to the soil.

He maintains that no-tillers need to keep in mind the idea that the earth was intended to be kept green year round.

—The Editors

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Follow The Money!

Here's how farmers capitalize on the valuable time savings gained from no-tilling.

By Holly Gray

FREEING UP TIME is among the major benefits of no-tilling.

While some no-tillers use the extra time working at off-farm jobs, others are lucky enough to be able to use the time to give back to the community through different agricultural-related organizations.

Off-Farm Income. Stan Smock uses the time no-tilling frees up working off the farm. The droughty soils at his Edinburgh, Ind., farm and low crop prices caused Smock to look for other sources of income.

The no-tiller purchased a used bucket truck 3 years ago and started trimming trees and painting commercial buildings and homes.

"Everybody's doing something," Smock says.

Some farmers in his area grow specialty crops to make extra money. Tomatoes have been very lucrative. Seed corn has also worked well for many farmers.

One of Smock's neighbors has a small construction business, one bought a backhoe and another who no-tills seed corn also works in a factory.

A Different Mind Set.

Working off the farm takes getting used to. "It takes a whole different mind set from where the farm always took precedence over everything," Smock says.

Smock says scheduling off-farm work has not proven to be a problem. He stops doing paint jobs after mid-April to devote his time to his no-tilling operation. After June 1, he starts painting again.

Last fall, Smock, who no-tills 650 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat, left a crop of soybeans sitting in the field to do a paint job.

Scheduling Is Key. "A lot of it is in the scheduling," Smock says.

Smock doesn't advertise his off-farm business. "I go strictly by word-of-mouth. I don't want to work for everybody," he says.

Last year was Smock's third full year of painting and tree trimming. He paints in the summer — anything from barns to historical

"Thanks to no-till, he spends 50 percent of his time doing off farm work..."

homes to churches — and handles tree trimming in the winter.

Smock spends 50 percent of his time

doing off-farm work.

He believes that no-tillers interested in working off the farm should try to get something unrelated to farming. "You need to get away from the farming sector," he says. "For instance, it would be really difficult trying to talk a neighbor into painting his barn when you know he doesn't have any more money in the bank than you do.

"You need to consider what kind of business would work with farming. You've got to see what your strong points are. Can you work for someone else? What's available? Will it blend well with your farming program or be a conflict?"

Smock says the possibilities for off-farm work depends on whether you're living in a very rural area or a more industrialized county like he does.

Smock's advice for those looking for off-farm income opportunities: "Follow the money."

Different Opportunities.

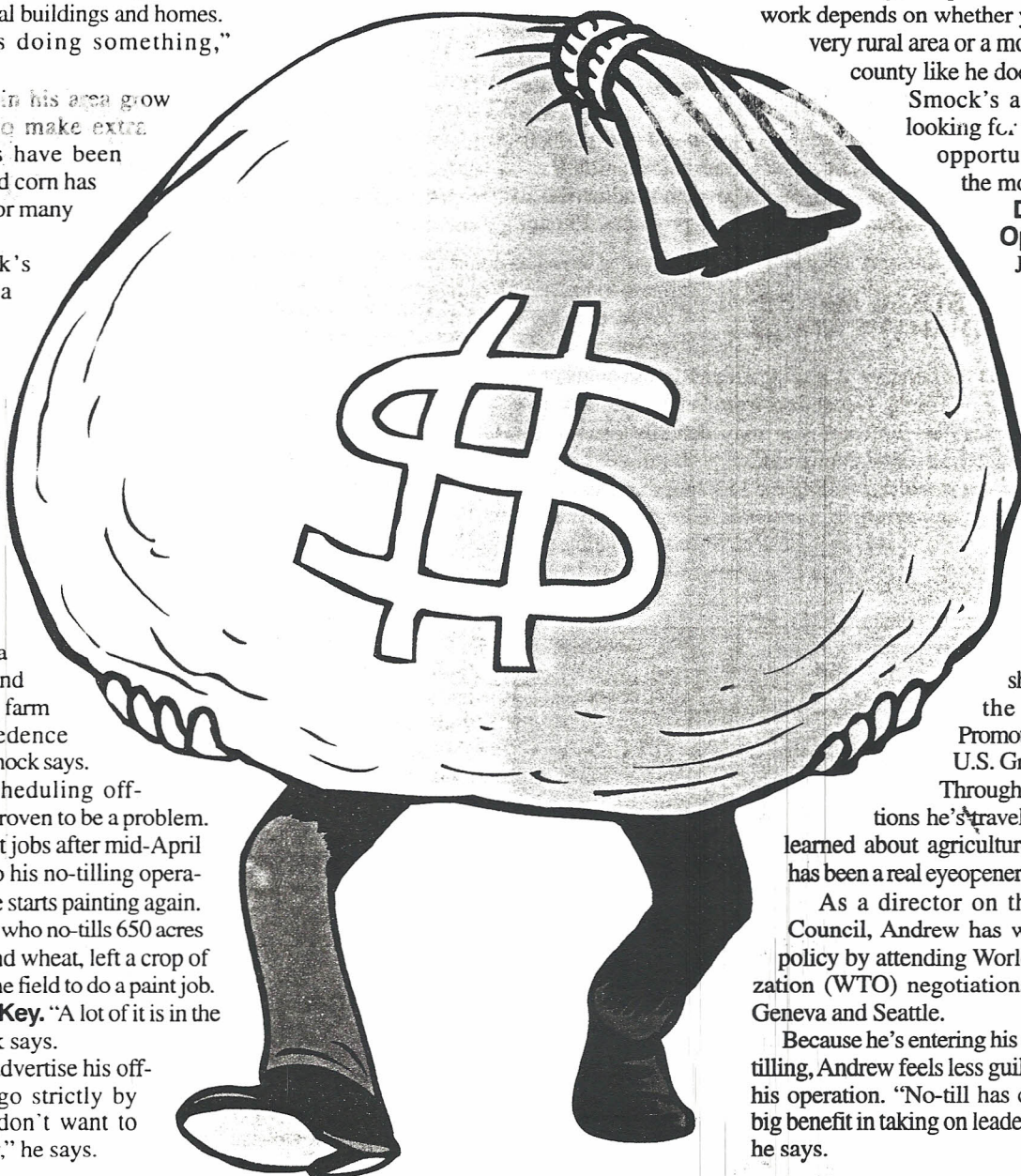
Jefferson, Iowa, no-tiller Jim Andrew, who no-tills 1,250 acres of corn and beans, uses the time he has gained by no-tilling in a different way than Smock.

Instead, he donates his time to leadership positions with the Iowa Corn Promotion board and the U.S. Grains Council.

Through these organizations he's traveled overseas and learned about agriculture abroad. "That has been a real eyeopener for me," he says.

As a director on the U.S. Grains Council, Andrew has worked on trade policy by attending World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations in Singapore, Geneva and Seattle.

Because he's entering his ninth year of no-tilling, Andrew feels less guilty about leaving his operation. "No-till has certainly been a big benefit in taking on leadership positions," he says.



Andrew is the chairman of the Trade Policy Coordinating Committee for the U.S. Grains Council. He helps identify policies to present a united front to the WTO for four organizations: the National Corn Growers Association, National Grain Sorghum Production Association, National Barley Association and the U.S. Grains Council.

"It allows me another opportunity to meet with farmers throughout the world," Andrew says.

Steward Of The Soil. Environmentalists are having a greater influence in WTO

"As a no-tiller I feel confident that I am a steward of the soil..."

discussions. "As a no-tiller I feel confident that I am a steward of the soil," Andrew says.

He visits with producers and trade negotiators and talks about how he is using no-till.

Andrew spends at least 1 month a year, if not more, on his leadership duties with these



organizations. "I really enjoy that stimulation mentally," he says. "There are rewards in life other than financial. This is in essence doing something for the good of mankind.

"I would not be able to have the luxury of that time if I did conventional farming."

Why No-Till? Andrew and his father were conventional farmers for over 15 years before considering no-till. "We basically looked at a labor deficit situation," he says. "Not only could no-till reduce labor, but it reduced fuel costs and tractor hours, which made up for some yield losses. The economics of no-till really pays off for us."

While his terms with the organizations will soon be over, Andrew looks forward to grooming new leadership.

He also plans to spend more time with his wife and family. "I owe my family a huge debt for allowing me to be gone as much as I am representing Iowa corn," he concludes.

Rock-N-Roll Farmer. Ortonville, Minn., farmer Todd Sandberg turned a long-lost passion into a money-making machine when he looked for off-farm opportunities. On any given night, Sandberg can be found turning out old and new sounds as a disc jockey known as the Rock-N-Roll Farmer. He started the business 3 years ago.

Eight years ago, Sandberg started no-tilling parts of his operation that consists of 950 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat.

Time Savings. While he's not 100 percent no-till, even incorporating no-till into a portion of his farming operation gleaned enough time for Sandberg to start his new endeavor.

Most of his disk jockey jobs are at night, so he is free most of the day to farm. But depending on location, some days he leaves early. There are times Sandberg puts his farming operation on hold just to get to a DJ job.

"You have to have flexibility if you are a DJ," he explains. "No-till offers me big time savings."

Sandberg's farming background helps with his DJ job, as most everybody in the area is a farmer or has relatives on the farm. He

"I wouldn't have the luxury of that time if I did conventional farming..."

often talks to people in the audience about farming, crops or their relatives. He mentions people by name, plays the air guitar and does a little karaoke.

Sandberg truly loves his second job. "The key is to find something you enjoy doing," he says. "If I didn't farm, I couldn't do this job," he adds.

Benefits Unequaled. Yes, no-till is environmentally prudent and is more cost effective than conventional tillage. And yes, no-till requires significantly less horsepower and iron.

But for Edward J. Foley Jr.'s 100-acre operation in Southeastern Pennsylvania, the time management benefits of no-till are unequaled.

Foley has a full-time off-farm job which requires significant time demands. He has a law practice in Philadelphia that consumes 50

to 60-plus hours a week and requires a daily 70-mile commute.

"With these significant time constraints it would be practically impossible to crop without no-till," Foley says.

While many Midwestern farmers would

say Foley's 100 acres of no-till crops is a mere garden plot, farmers in his area can't believe he can run a full-time law practice and farm 100 acres.

"What they don't realize is that no-till makes it not only possible but a true pleasure," Foley says.

Vacation Time.

Each spring, Foley takes vacation time to plan and each fall he takes more vacation time to harvest. "I can utilize no-till technology and communication technology to plant at the critical times while insuring that my law practice is not neglected," he says.

"When litigating and enforcing the rights of individuals, no-till planting and harvesting times are completely irrelevant. I have often found myself sitting on the tractor seat taking a conference call with opposing counsel and a judge to argue arcane points of law or to conduct settlement discussions.

"My own experience makes it abundantly clear that the same time saving technology employed by a no-till farmer to plant 1,000 acres or more is just as useful if not more so to the 100-acre operator with full-time professional off-farm employment."



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