
Tillage Survey Revealing

University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension and Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service have joined forces in the No-Till Cadre Educational Group. One of the tasks of this group has been to keep collecting no-till survey information. In 2006 when I assisted in the spring planting survey in Gage, Johnson, Pawnee, and Jefferson Counties, I collected data on planted wheat. To do this I needed to exit the car and physically look into the fields to assess the residue cover. Very few or no other counties collected this data. The No-till Cadre decided to do a fall 2007 survey for those counties with quite a bit of wheat followed by a spring crop survey in May 2008.

The data has been collected in Gage, Johnson and Pawnee Counties. Jefferson County will be completed in the next week, weather permitting. In Gage County 80.1% of the planted wheat is no-till with more than half those acres showing enough past crop years residue to likely be continuous no-till. I guess we should expect that in a County with 141 carbon sequestration contracts. Gage County leads Nebraska with over \$599,417 collected for storing carbon as organic matter in County soils. A solid statement of the strong conservation ethic of most Gage County farmers.

Most of the tilled fields were wheat on wheat. 16.3% of the fields surveyed had less than 15% residue cover and 2.8% of fields had between 15% and 30% residue cover. The residue cover or lack of it was very evident in the visible erosion and soil crusting in fields with little or no cover. The amount of wheat on wheat is decreasing, but it still puzzles me when corn no-tilled into wheat stubble has an outstanding dryland yield record in Southeast Nebraska.

There is a bright spot in Johnson County. Unfortunately it is not in the adoption of no-till. They are doing lots of terrace, tile outlet terrace and other conservation structural work in Johnson County. It was great to get to know the new Resource Conservationist in Tecumseh. I believe Johnson County will benefit from her talents.

Only 31.2% of the Johnson County fields were no-tilled with one-tenth of those showing a history of no-till. That leaves 56.3% of the fields with less than 15% cover, and 12.5% with 15-30% cover representing a light pass on corn stubble prior to drilling. You would think that with the corn price nearing \$4.00 a bushel and fuel prices over \$3.00 per gallon farmers would have an interest in the extra 25 bushels per acre from no-till corn on wheat stubble! No-till requires only 50% as much fuel as conventional tillage.

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