Big Pine Creek Watershed Project

Best Management Practices Fact Sheet

Conservation Tillage

Photo courtesy of United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation tillage includes the practices of no till, strip till and mulch till. These practices aim at managing the amount, orientation and distribution of crop residue on the soil surface year round while limiting the soil disturbing activities used in the cropping system.

Purposes of conservation tillage include, but are not limited to:

- Reducing sheet, rill, and wind erosion.
- Improving soil organic matter content.
- Improving soil health and soil quality.
- Reducing fuel use.
- Increasing plant available moisture.

No Till is a cropping system where the only soil disturbing operation occurs at the time of planting and this soil disturbance is limited to the action of a coulter and the double disc openers attached to the no-till planter.

Strip Till is a cropping system where a narrow strip of soil is tilled for each row into which the subsequent crop will be planted. In a corn-soybean rotation, strip tillage typically occurs in the fall after the soybeans have been harvested. Lime and fertilizer are incorporated into the soil at the time of this strip tillage operation. The following spring, corn is planted into these prepared strips leaving the remainder of the field undisturbed. In alternating years, the soybean crop is typically planted or drilled without any primary or secondary tillage operations.

Mulch Till is a tillage system where the majority of the soil surface is disturbed by tillage operations such as vertical tillage, chiseling or disking yet the majority of the crop residue is left on the soil surface to protect against soil erosion. To comply with the practice standards for mulch till, the maximum Soil Tillage Intensity Rating (STIR) must be less than 30. Additionally, the planned cropping system using the current approved Soil Conditioning Index (SCI) procedure must result in a positive trend as compared to the existing cropping system.

For more information concerning the no till, strip till or mulch till practices, see the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Codes 329 and 345 which can be found at: http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/toc.aspx?CatID=4288

Available financial assistance**:**

The Big Pine Creek Watershed group will be offering cost-share incentives to help producers adopt best management practices (BMPs) aimed at reducing the amount of nutrients, sediment and bacteria entering our surface waters. **Conservation tillage** is one of the BMPs we want to encourage. The financial incentives for conservation tillage will come in the form of reimbursement of 75% of the prevailing NRCS EQIP payment rates. Applications for cost share assistance are available from the Soil & Water Conservation District offices in Benton, Warren and White counties.

- To be considered for funding for the 2015 cropping season, completed applications must be turned in by January 1st, 2015.
- Applications will be ranked based on merit. Pairing conservation tillage with other conservation practices such as cover crops and/or filter strips will increase the ranking score of the application.
- Applicants will be notified by February 13th, 2015 as to whether they will receive funding.
- Successful applicants will sign a contract spelling out the terms of the cost-share agreement.
- Tracts on which this funding is requested will be subject to inspections both prior to and after the planting operation to determine if the applicable NRCS conservation practice standard is being met.
- If the conservation tillage practice in the field meets the NRCS conservation practice standard, and the field passes visual inspections, the applicant will be mailed a reimbursement check.