**.​** CONSERVATION TILLAGE
5/7/18

Conservation tillage practices improves soil health, reduces farmers inputs and time required for crop production, and others to be mentioned later.

I remember vividly the first no-till or conservation tillage demonstration introduced to farmers in our home county. Corn was to be planted into a rather heavy fescue or grass sod in a long narrow bottom strip of land. The fescue was "burned-down" (killed) using "Paraguat"herbicide, followed by "Atrazine and Lasso" herbicides for future weed and grass control. Fertilizer was broadcast over the surface of the bottom land field. The corn was planted using a new "Allis Chalmers" sod planter and laid-by until harvest. The total time required was about 4 hours for 2 to 3 acres of corn, start to finish.

Several area farmers were on hand to observe and laugh about this crazy no-till corn project. "You know that corn can not be grown in all that grass. It must be plowed and that grass turned under and working the ground to prepare a seed bed," was their comments.

Want to venture a guess as to what happened come harvest time ?????? The corn grew well all summer. The harvest yield was as good or better than most neighboring corn fields using traditional tillage methods. They didn't laugh too much after harvest, but scratched their heads wondering -- maybe that No-Till stuff willl work after all.

Today many conservation tillage systems (those with minimum disturbance of soil; minimum-till, strip-till, or no-till) begins with a cover crop such s turnips,radishes, cereal rye or other small grains, vetch and crimson clover. There are several combinations of grasses and legumes planted as cover crops in late fall or early winter following harvest of crops -- corn, soybeans, grain sorghum or other row crops.

These cover crops are burned down or killed prior to planting of current years crops in the early spring. Farmers plant current years crops into the cover crop residue.

These cover crop residues help build organic matter while improving soil health. These mulches or organic matter residues aids in reduction of erosion, improves soil fertility, water infiltration, and the holding of water for crop growth. The mulch or crop residue aids in weed control thus reducing the use of herbicides. Fertilizer and/or lime required can be broadcast on the surface and carried into the soil by rain fall.

Conservation tillage reduces time required for planting - fewer trips across the field (reduced soil compaction), less fuel used, less wear and tear on equipment, less greenhouse gas produced, less herbicides and chemical fertilizers used, thus conservation tillage is more environmental friendly.

The crop yields can be just as good or better than traditional tillage methods. Conservation tillage is an on going learning process that doesn't happen over night. Do not just plant and forget the crop until harvest. Always scout the field for crop progress.

Conservation tillage is just one more way farmers are becomming more sustainable and environmental friendly.

Related articles of interest
- [Cover Crop Saga](http://weebly-file/1/8/9/9/18991133/41014_cover_crop_saga_farmer_corner.doc)
-[Livestock Stewardship](http://weebly-file/1/8/9/9/18991133/stewardship_030214_editoral.doc)