

STRIP-TILLING A BETTER BET, SAY THESE MANUFACTURERS

Say "No" To No-Till?

One-trip no-till corn planting costs farmers an average of about 30 bu. per acre, say some manufacturers who think farmers should stop loading up planters with no-till attachments. The best way to get most of the benefits of no-till without the drawbacks, they maintain, is to make a separate trip with a strip-till toolbar to work up a strip of soil that can then be planted conventionally.

Here's how three such strip-till systems work and what their manufacturers are saying about them:

Progressive Farm Products

No-till farming is an idea whose time should end, says Richard Follmer, owner and head innovator at Progressive Farm Products, Hudson, Ill., who regularly takes on the media, Extension Service, chemical companies, implement manufacturers and others who say one-trip zero-till corn planting is the way to go.

"I've been getting a lot of complaints from farmers at farm shows who want to know what they're doing wrong because they're not getting the yields with no-till that they read about in farm magazines. When I tell them one-trip no-till corn planting will never work the way they want it to, they don't believe me because that's not what they're hearing everywhere else," says Follmer.

He's quick to state that putting no-till attachments on planter toolbars may work fine in some soils, but he feels it won't work in heavy soils like you commonly find in much of the Midwest. And it's especially troublesome, he notes, for farmers with different types of soil on their farms.

"You can get all the attachments set for one type of soil, but when you get into another type, you'll get into trouble. Depth control and seed spacing suffer and you'll have plugging and other problems," he says.

In heavy soils, the ground needs to be opened up and allowed to warm up a bit before corn is planted, he says.



Progressive Farm Products sells strip-till toolbars equipped with planter markers. They till precise 10-in. wide row strips in the field for planting by conventionally-equipped planters. You can either run the strip-till toolbar through the field in the fall and then plant in the spring, or run the toolbar through the field a couple hours before planting. Fertilizer and chemicals can be applied with the strip-till toolbar.

Follmer recently introduced a new dry fertilizer spreader for air delivery into strip-tilled rows. A large hopper runs on its own wheeled chassis ahead of the toolbar. An air manifold beneath the hopper directs fertilizer to each row.

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Row-Tech, Inc.

A Michigan farmer who raises 2,000 acres of crops, says that after 10 years of trying no-till and ridge-till, he and other family members finally came up with a minimum tillage system that works for them.

"We farm glacial soils that include silt, clay and river bottom gumbos. We've had problems with no-till attachments on planters because no one system works best in all soils. If you move from one soil to another without changing settings on your no-till attachments, it throws your planter off and yields suffer," says Dave Roggenbuck, who's started a company called Row-Tech, Inc., to manufacture the "Trans-Till" system he developed with his father Vincent, brother Paul, and brother-in-law Jeff.

"After over 100 years, conventional row crop planters have been developed to the point where they adapt easily to different soil types and work well under nearly all conditions. What seems to be happening is that we're throwing away all those years of research and development by mounting all kinds of attachments on planters that hurt performance, unless you're lucky enough to have perfect conditions," says Roggenbuck.

He says Row-Tech's new Trans-Till system makes use of the best attributes of both conventional and no-till planting.

It consists of a heavy-duty 7 by 7-in. toolbar fitted with a fluted coulters up front followed by a specially-designed subsoiler knife with a pair of wavy coulters on either side.

The front coulters cut residue. The subsoiler shank fractures soil in the row, and lifts it so residue falls off to either side. The wavy coulters on either side of the shank till up the row zone. Even though none of the coulters is angled off to the side, Roggenbuck says residue is thrown out of the row zone, leaving a cleanly tilled, 10-in. strip.

"You can plant into the strips with an unmodified conventional planter. It's much easier to adjust a tillage toolbar to changing field conditions than to try to adjust no-till



attachments mounted on a planter. We use a team planting approach. One tractor runs through the field with the Trans-Till toolbar, and the planter follows soon after, pulled by another tractor. It lets you concentrate on one job at a time, rather than worrying about tilling up soil at the same time you're trying to get seed into the ground," says Roggenbuck.

Opening up the soil before planting corn prevents many common no-till problems like slow growth, surface compaction, side wall compaction, and wet planting conditions. Getting extra attachments off the planter also prevents planter wear and tear, notes Roggenbuck.

"This system also eliminates drawbacks of conventional tillage like large machinery investments, soil erosion, multiple trips through the field, and so on," says Roggenbuck.

Depth of the Trans-Till can be set at 4, 6.5, or 9 in. and a stainless steel fertilizer tube on the back of the subsoiler knives lets you inject liquid fertilizer under the seed in the row.

"We prefer to use the Trans-Till in the spring in corn stalks and soy stubble but we use it in the fall in wheat ground to reduce disease problems," says Roggenbuck.

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residue to prevent plugging and help the rig track straight so it's easy for the planter to follow. Other strip-till toolbars often don't track straight, making it hard for the planter to follow," notes Weis.

The second bar on the triple toolbar is fitted with 4 subsoiler shanks that mount directly behind the tractor tires to break up compaction. The third bar has subsoiler shanks that run in each row to be planted. The two wavy coulters behind each shank move soil back into the grooves created by the shanks, and also cut more trash.

"It does a tremendous job breaking up compaction and minimizes evaporation of soil moisture. It chops up residue yet leaves it on the surface. You can run it through in the fall, or several hours before planting in the spring. It eliminates the need for no-till attachments on the planter," says Weis, adding that the new rig can be outfitted for liquid fertilizer and chemical application.

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Farmer's Equipment Co.

"We built only a few of them last spring but response was excellent," says Harold Weis, Torrington, Wyo., about his "Till-N-Plant" toolbar designed to prepare row strips in fields ahead of row crop planters.

Fitted with planter-style markers, each row unit on the Till-N-Plant has a large flat

coulters up front followed by a subsoiler shank and a pair of wavy coulters. A rolling basket follows behind, breaking up clods and firming up the seedbed. The new tillage tool is fitted with single rib tires that match up with single rib tires on the planter tractor.

"The flat coulters up front cut through