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No-till acreage up in 1984

No-till farming, the "cadillac" of conservation tillage methods for soil conservation purposes, continued rapid growth in Iowa in 1984. Estimates show more than 600,000 acres were no-tilled in 1984, compared to 400,000 in 1983.

"That's a 50 percent increase in a year, and is also 6 times as much as the acreage in 1980," says Mike Nethery, state conservationist for the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS). The SCS worked with other agencies in making the survey cooperatively with the National Conservation Tillage Information Center at Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

The bulk of the acreage was corn, with 522,500 acres planted by no-till. Another 95,500 acres of soybeans were planted by no-till.

"We're pleased to see the increase in this soil-saving practice, and we're especially pleased that the increase came from all areas of the state," Nethery says. No-till planting is done without disturbing the land, thus leaving the past year's crop residues on the soil surface for soil protection.

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Ridge-till, a method of planting on ridges that is gaining in popularity, increased slightly in 1984. The estimate is 227,650 acres in 1984 compared to 220,340 in 1983. Strip-till, a method similar to ridge-till but where the crop is not planted on ridges, was used on 57,000 acres in 1984 compared to 64,380 in 1983.

Mulch tillage, which disturbs the entire soil surface in preparation for planting, was used on 8,388,500 acres in 1984 compared to 8,678,260 in 1983.

Overall, acreages of conservation tillage have been down in Iowa the past two years. SCS agronomist Bob Dayton attributes the reduced acreage to changes in the reporting requirements and to reduced rowcrop acres with the 1983 PIK program.

Totally, about 9,291,000 acres of corn and soybeans were planted with conservation tillage in 1984. The estimate compares to 9,379,000 acres in 1983.

Dayton points out that a national definition was made of what qualifies as conservation tillage in 1983. "Now, we look at corn and bean fields after planting, and everything we report as conservation tillage has at least 30 percent of the ground covered by the previous year's residue," he says.

National figures are currently being compiled by the Conservation Tillage Information Center and are expected to be released in early February.

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