

Bentonians urged to consider minimum tillage

TIMESNEWS—Benton farmers who want to plant earlier this year to take advantage of what moisture is in the soil are being encouraged to consider "conservation tillage."

This type of system leaves crop residues on the soil surface, and requires fewer trips across a field before planting. With some systems, planting is the only operation, says Floyd Peters, district conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service in

Benton County.

"To be able to plant earlier, you've got to be in the field planting when your neighbor is plowing, disking, or harrowing," Peters says. The condition your soil is in, the amount of crop residue you have to work with, and the type of planter you have are important points to consider.

The main point in deciding when to plant is to start as soon as the soil is fit to plant in. "As soon as the soil is warm enough and

dry enough, you're ready to go with no-till, slot planting or till planting," says SCS agronomist John Maddy. "Some farmers shred cornstalks or disc lightly ahead of planting with these systems," he says, "but the idea is to plant in the row of last year's crop. Disking can destroy the warm, dry soil in that crop row, and delay planting."

Over-working the ground before planting not only causes later planting—it also

covers crop residues. Those residues are valuable in preventing soil erosion by wind and water. In soybean land in particular, residues are easily buried. "This land is ideal for a no-till or till plant system," the agronomist says.

The soil conservationists say that if fertilizer and herbicide incorporation are needed, they recommend chiseling or disking lightly to leave as much residue on the soil surface as possible.