

Farmers hear the call of the no-till method

By CATHY CUMMINS
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Not many fields are going to be tilled before planting this spring, not if the rapt silence of the more than 100 Black Hawk County farmers who packed a meeting on no-till farming Monday night is any indication.

The environmental, conservationist mindset definitely is taking hold in this crowd. And many more farmers are talking about how to keep their soil on the fields where it belongs instead of floating down the nearest drainage ditch or held aloft on a gust of wind.

For 90 minutes in the Izaak Walton League Clubhouse in Washburn, a panel of five people who farm with conservation in mind talked to the crowd about abandoning traditional plowing and planting practices.

With the fervor of fledgling converts to a new religion the five rose to their feet and — whether drawing pictures with a felt-tip pen or flipping through a cassette of slides — told the crowd why they changed the way they plowed their fields or quit plowing altogether.

To a man they agreed it's not easy to change the traditional mindset that demands that the plows go trundling across the fields time after time during the season, but the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

Curt Hollis, a Waterloo farmer who since 1983 has planted his crops on top of carefully built-up ridges, wasn't completely sold on the whole idea until last year.

But the sight of several inches of rain eagerly eroding other fields

last spring while his seed remained high and dry above the flood and his soil remained firmly in place finally convinced him, Hollis said.

Leaving cornstalks or soybean vines to decompose on top of the soil surface after harvest, instead of plowing them into the ground, reduces soil erosion from wind and water. The practice also holds more water in the ground, which is helpful during drought seasons.

Moreover, ridge-tilling, no-tilling or other soil conservation practices are gaining praise from environmentalists.

"With environmental concerns getting a lot of attention, we gotta do something good for the environment," said Dave Roll, a four-year, no-till planter from Allison in Butler County.

Another benefit is higher yields, said Gary Karkosh, a farmer in southwest Black Hawk County. His fields have had higher yields of corn and soybeans since he began conservation tillage, he said.

On the down side, farming with conservation practices requires a lot more hands-on management during the season than ripping through the field a few times with a tractor and cultivator, he said.

With lots of residue holding water on the fields, it will take a few extra days to dry out from the winter than fields plowed bare, he said.

No-till and low-till practices also require more time on hands and knees scouting the field for weeds, he said. If the weeds are up, it's time to get out the herbicide and cultivator. "No weeds — go fishing," he said.

Fayette

DES MOINES (AP) — Kossuth County, Iowa's largest, remains firm in soybean production, but it has lost its title as the state's top corn producer for the first time in half a century.

The Iowa Agriculture Statistics office reported Monday that Pottawattamie County in west central Iowa was the top corn producer and was second to Fayette County in yield per acre. Kossuth dropped to fifth. It has led in corn production since 1945.

The preliminary county-by-county report also showed Iowa's total 1990 corn production, stunted by rain-delayed planting and an early frost, was 1.43 billion bushels or an average of 117 bushels an acre.

The 1990 total was about 1.56 billion bushels and 126 bushels per acre.

The total soybean yield was 350.1 million bushels, an average of 40.1 bushels per acre. That compares with the 1990 yield of 323.9 million bushels and an average of 41 bushels an acre.

Some farmers who intended to plant corn switched to faster-maturing soybeans last year after rains in north central counties delayed planting.

Farmers in Pottawattamie County had the largest corn harvest at 32.1 million bushels. Sioux County in the northwest corner of the state was second at 28.6 million, followed by Fayette at 26.6 million, Plymouth at 26.5 million and Kossuth at 25.8 million bushels.

In Kossuth, the 1991 harvest was nearly a third less than the 1990 harvest of 38 million bushels.

Withholding

The Baltimore Sun

WASHINGTON — President Bush's effort to stimulate the economy by cutting the amount of federal taxes withheld from paychecks each week may be an economic and political fiasco.

People across the country are rejecting Bush's decision to unilaterally lower their refund checks from the Internal Revenue Service.

BRIEFLY

Housing starts surge 9.6 percent in February

WASHINGTON (AP) — Housing starts surged a stronger-than-expected 9.6 percent in February, with the gains spread across every region of the country.

share, from \$15 million, or 78 cents a share, the same quarter of the previous year. Sales for the quarter increased 18 percent, to \$271 million from \$229 million.

Non-profit organization

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Meeting sponsored by B.H. SWCD, Ag Business and Concerned citizens trying to start a Conservation Tillage Club