Minimum tillage aids in profits

1-16-86

by Steve Yaddof

One of the best ways for farmers to improve profits is to cut overhead by combining several farming operations into one, or reducing tillage.

Minimum tillage is reducing one or more operations over the land. A farmer combines several operations, such as fertilizing, planting and applying herbicies.

Minimum tillage conserves soil by leaving more (crop) residue on the land and reducing wind erosion. The process also saves fuel and labor costs by reducing trips.

By eliminating trips, farmers reduce soil compaction leaving the soil in a better state of tilth.

Conventional land preparation and planting may take five to seven gallons of fuel per acre. If tillage is reduced, fuel consumption is also reduced.

Some farmers plant crops directly into the stubble of previous crops, without other preparations such as plowing which destroys soil residue and takes additional time.

Reduce tillage and farmers reduce erosion. Residues on the soil also help wildlife by providing food and cover.

Plowing often with no mulch (crop residue) on the land surface when planting continuous (grain) crops can cause the loss of 36 tons of soil per acre annually, according to the Soil Conservation Service.

But if crops are planted without plowing, land is terraced and contoured and a mulch of crop residue is left on the surface all year long, only about .6 tons of soil per the acre will be lost annually by erosion.

Agriculture can be blamed for about half of the sediment produced by erosion in the United States.

No citizen is exempt from the ill effects of sedimentation. To every citizen it means higher living costs and more frequent requests for disaster funds.

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