

Rain!

By Mark Watson

Panhandle No-Till Educator

We finally got a rain! We received 1.45 inches of rain over the weekend which brings our total for the month of August to 1.55 inches, and our total for the year to 8.12 inches. Unfortunately, we are still running a deficit of 3.75 inches for the year. A good rain like this gives you hope that maybe this is the beginning of the end of a prolonged drought. We'll have to wait and see.

I was on a mini vacation with my family to Lake McConaughy when the rains came. Didn't do much for the fishing, but gave me a chance to make some observations on the drive home. I drove from the lake to Oshkosh, through Chappell, on to Sidney, then home. Most of the area I drove through received a nice rain.

What was interesting was to observe the different farming practices and look at how the rain affected each practice. There were fields of millet, sunflower, and dry land corn that were really utilizing the rain to produce grain. There were some awfully good looking fields with high yield potential along the route home. These producers really took advantage of this late summer rain to enhance the profitability of their farming operation.

There were also several fields of conventional wheat/fallow where soil erosion was quite apparent. The draws and gullies in the fields had obviously carried a lot of water and soil through them and to the low spots in the fields. A lot of the rain that fell on these fields ended up in small lakes in the low area of the field. Poor water infiltration due to the lack of residue and poor soil aggregation led to this problem. It doesn't matter how much rain you receive if you can't get it past the soil surface. The hill tops looked white as they dried and were prime candidates for serious wind erosion. I would guess that with today's forecast of south winds blowing 20-30 mph out of the south, these producers will be hooking up a light tillage tool to rough up their ground to prevent wind erosion.

No till farming practices can virtually eliminate wind and water erosion! By leaving the previous crops residue on the soil surface, building good soil aggregation, good soil structure, and improving water holding capacity of the soil we can capture the moisture where it falls and benefit the crops we produce! No till farming provides us the opportunity to improve the soils we farm and capture the moisture Mother Nature provides. There is no need to continue allowing our soils to degrade because of tillage practices.

To learn more about no till farming and the benefits it provides plan to attend the no till field day on September 3 at our farm. No Till On the Plains is hosting a day-long field day which will provide producers with the opportunity to learn more about no till farming with some very knowledgeable educators. Full details are at www.notill.org/ww_tour/ww_08/alliance_08.htm.

We haven't irrigated on our farm with the recent rains, so our totals for the year are the same as last week. Up to this point we have used 7 inches of irrigation on our corn, 4.5 inches on our edible beans, 1 inch on our cover/forage crop, and 7.5 inches on our winter wheat.

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