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No Till Notes: What Do You Think?

By Mark Watson, Panhandle No Till Educator

In my last few articles I discussed a few ideas on how we could possibly change the way we grow some of our high water use crops and lower the overall water use of these crops. I think sugar beets could be adapted to fit a no till farming system. Forage crops could be grown by reducing the number of cuttings of alfalfa, using some alternative forages, or substituting protein from a crop like field peas which could be grown on our dry land acres. Will any of these ideas work? We won't really know unless we research and attempt to adapt them. I'm sure there are other alternatives out there that I'm not aware of which may also lower our water use in the Panhandle.

I spoke at a meeting in Lincoln last winter for the Nebraska Agribusiness Association. It turned out my college agronomy professor, Dr. Dale Flowerday, was the host for the meeting. I hadn't seen Dr. Flowerday since my college days, so it was good to visit with him. He told me he wished he had taught more about no till farming practices when he was an instructor at UNL. He was convinced that no till farming practices were adaptable for every farming operation and producers needed to adapt no till for the benefits to the soil.

Dr. Flowerday also gave a brief presentation to the group to start the meeting. He told the meeting that if you thought no till farming practices wouldn't work on your farm, you were absolutely right! He went on to say you had to be willing to learn new techniques and adapt new ways of looking at your farming practices in order for no till to work for you.

My whole intent in suggesting these alternatives is to get producers to begin examining their own operations. As producers we need to look for ways to reduce our dependence on irrigation water and use this water as efficiently as possible. When you look at your operation keep an open mind to the possibilities of no till farming practices and how they may fit in your crop production system. Look for alternatives to how we have been operating and how we can improve upon these operations. Some of the ideas may not work or may need to be adjusted.

The important aspect of our water usage is that we look for alternatives to lower our water consumption and use this valuable resource as efficiently as possible. With no till crop production practices you start by improving the characteristics of the soil we work with and the water savings will follow. We will be better crop production, soil and water managers as a result.

There's only a week until the Winter No Till Conference on November 18-19 at the Gering Civic Center. This conference will be an excellent opportunity for producers to learn and see first-hand how no till can be started, enhanced, and continued on their place. Some of these newer no till ideas will even be discussed, so if you want to get in on the conversation, make sure you come to Gering. Get registered now at <http://www.panhandlercd.org/notill.htm>.