

Date: For the week of August 9, 2009

No Till Notes: Carbon

By Mark Watson, Panhandle No Till Educator

If you are like most of us you haven't given much thought to carbon. Carbon is extremely important to our soils and how they perform. The plants we grow on the farm depend on carbon more than any other nutrient, but most of us don't pay much attention to carbon. I guess we take carbon for granted.

Carbon is in the national news quite a bit as global warming is debated around the country. Our national leaders are looking at a cap and trade policy which will regulate how much carbon dioxide can be emitted into the atmosphere. Carbon is traded on the Chicago Climate Exchange as a commodity. The value of carbon may increase if the emission of carbon dioxide is regulated. Ranchers and farmers are being paid to store carbon in the soil if they qualify with their production practices. In our soils here in the Panhandle if you use no till crop production practices you are paid to sequester .4 of a metric ton of carbon on dry land acres and .6 of a metric ton on irrigated acres per year.

As it turns out carbon has quite a bit to do with how healthy our soils are, how healthy the crops are that we produce, and possibly how healthy humans are if we can sequester carbon in the soil and minimize the effects of global warming by capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing the carbon in our soil. Carbon may be a lot more important than most of us thought so I'd like to take a closer look at carbon in the upcoming articles and explore what is really a pretty important component of production agriculture.

I've been negligent in reporting our irrigation use for the past few weeks, so I'll update you now. On our irrigated wheat we used a total of 2.25 inches for the year. We just finished harvesting the wheat yesterday and it looks like the wheat yielded around 90-95 bushels/acre on our farm. I don't have the scale tickets back as of now. So far we have irrigated two inches on our edible beans and three inches on our corn. Both crops are progressing but I've got to think we are going to need a long fall with a late freeze to get our crops to maturity.