

TILLAGE

Spring 2009



Sustainable Conservation
Because the Environment is Everyone's Business



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GUARANTEE YOUR YIELD

TAKE THE BMP CHALLENGE

Wouldn't it be great to have a guarantee for conservation practices that can also save you money? Farmers in the Mid-West have been taking advantage of just such a guarantee. Now we are bringing this opportunity to farmers in California.

Seeing is believing! The Best Management Practices (BMP) CHALLENGE protects your income so you can see how reduced tillage or nutrient management practices perform, in your own fields, without risk!

Thanks to a grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the BMP CHALLENGE is available for corn silage in California for the 2009 spring planting.

The BMP CHALLENGE process is easy from start to finish. Working with a crop advisor or the Conservation Tillage Workgroup, you select a field to enroll. You apply your usual nutrient application rate or tillage practice on a check strip in the same test field while the rest receives

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CONSERVATION TILLAGE MYTHS

Tom Barcellos a dairy producer from Tipton, Calif., farms more than 1,800 acres. He has been using conservation tillage since 2001. Barcellos addresses common conservation tillage myths.

Yield loss
False. There is no yield loss associated with conservation tillage. "When we first started experimenting with conservation tillage we were looking to just meet conventional tillage yields, due to the



Tom Barcellos

savings with fuel and labor." Since then Barcellos has been pleasantly surprised. "We have had just the opposite when it comes to yields," says Barcellos. In some instances he says they have seen as much as a 20 percent increase. In *myths continued on page 4*

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TILLAGE INNOVATOR HONORED

Dairy farmer Dino Giacomazzi, who heads up the Giacomazzi Dairy in the same Hanford location where it was established in 1893, has been presented the Conservation Tillage Farmer Innovator Award for 2009 by the University of California and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Tillage Workgroup.



Dino Giacomazzi

The award, established in 2005, honors farmers who have demonstrated innovation and leadership in the development, refinement and use of conservation tillage (CT) systems in California.

“Giacomazzi epitomizes the intent of this prestigious CT workgroup award and he continues, and indeed enhances, our tradition of acknowledging truly outstanding innovation and achievement,” said Jeff Mitchell, UC Cooperative Extension vegetable crops specialist and the

workgroup’s chair, in presenting the honor.

In 2005, Giacomazzi initiated a demonstration evaluation of strip-till corn planting in a 28-acre field on his dairy.

“In his evaluation, he very thoroughly assessed all aspects of this new CT system and virtually guaranteed its ultimate success by the sheer intensity of this effort and by the comprehensive nature of his attention to detail,” Mitchell said.

The next year, Giacomazzi set out a comprehensive array of strip-tillage evaluations that included three different strip-till implements, strip-till corn varieties and twin-row versus single-row planting configurations. Later in the season, he opened his dairy for a Strip-Till Field Day that attracted more than 150 farmers to view his evaluations’ results.

“To this day, I consider this field day to be the most successful extension education event that I have been involved with during my 14 years of service with UC,” Mitchell said.

California Tillage newsletter

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Giacomazzi repeated the field day in 2007. In spring 2008 he organized a public hearing session for the California Assembly Committee on Agriculture, chaired by Assemblywoman Nicole Parra. At the same time, Giacomazzi continued with his CT innovations on the farm, using a twin-row Monosem planter and GPS precision guidance application technologies from Trimble Corporation. This instrumentation is designed to permit precision seed and nutrient application in the same planting pass.

See us at
World Ag Expo
DS31

(corner of U street &
Elk Bayou Rd)

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the BMP nutrient rates or reduced tillage. At harvest, you and your advisor compare yields and net returns.

We compensate you any net income loss. It’s a great risk-free educational experience for farmers and advisors.

This program has been used successfully in conjunction with grant-funded projects including the Environmental

Protection Agency 319. To date, participating producers have saved

*“In my opinion, the BMP Challenge program is a no-brainer. There is no way a farmer can lose.”
- corn producer and BMP Challenge participant*

more than 150,000 lbs of nitrogen and an estimated 2,000 tons of sediment loss in the Mid-West.

The BMP CHALLENGE is a collaborative project of Agflex, the IPM Institute of North America, American Farmland Trust, California Conservation Tillage Workgroup, and Sustainable Conservation.

For more information about the BMP Challenge contact:

Jeff Mitchell, California Conservation Tillage Workgroup at (559) 303-9689 or Ladi Asgill, Sustainable Conservation at (209) 576-7729.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO CONSERVATION TILLAGE

The term conservation tillage can mean a variety of things. To Alan Wilcox, owner of Wilcox Agri-Products, conservation tillage means finding the most cultural benefit for every gallon of fuel, without sacrificing yields or quality.

In Wilcox's mind, all roads lead to conservation tillage, however he knew that he had to find a way to not just cut costs but improve growers yields.

From this thought process the Wilcox Eliminator and Wilcox Performer were born.

Wilcox Eliminator

The Eliminator system is the first tool capable of both primary and secondary tillage. This has obvious advantages in spreading the use of any capital investment over more acres, says Wilcox. In many cases, the Eliminator is capable of completing all necessary operations from post harvest up to planting time. "Because of this factor, the Wilcox Eliminator is far more than an implement; it would be better described as 'a system'," he says.

Advantages of a reduced tillage system, like the Eliminator:

- Logistics. Less equipment to move and supervise.
- Man Power. Fewer implements with fewer passes equates to utilizing only the growers best operators.

- Maintenance. A single low maintenance tool drastically reduce growers equipment maintenance program.
- Timeliness. Best utilization of optimum planting window. Best utilization of top yielding full season varieties.

Cost savings from using a system like the Eliminator vary depending upon the crop grown. According to Wilcox a dry land wheat grower can save \$30 to \$40 per acre, while a strawberry grower can save \$100 to \$120 per acre.

Wilcox Performer

The Wilcox Performer may be one of the most versatile and multi-functional tools available today, says Wilcox.

The Performer can complete fertilizer and herbicide applications, and list and shape beds in the same pass.

For more information call Wilcox Agri-Products at: (916) 776-1784 or go to: www.wilcoxap.com

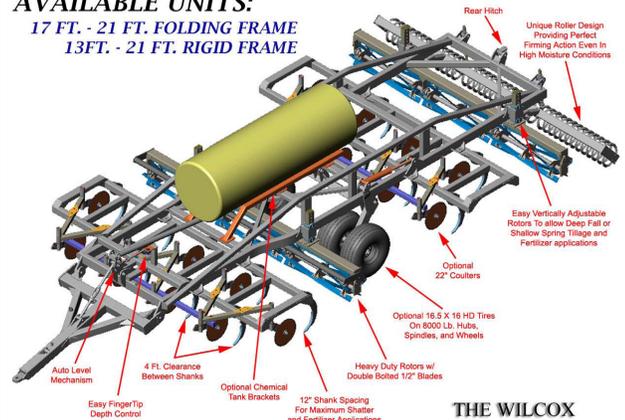
IT WORKS!

Frank Silva is a farmer from Walnut Grove, Calif., who knows conservation tillage works. "I admit I was skeptical about trying conservation tillage. I had the old-school mentality and didn't want to lose any of my yield," says Silva.

The first season, Silva says he didn't see any change in production, but reaped the benefit of lower costs. Now, six years later he is seeing one-half ton more per acre. This yield increase is in addition to the cost savings he sees on fuel. "In 2002 we saved \$50 per acre in fuel alone, that was before fuel prices went through the roof," he says.

Silva was able to eliminate 8 passes from his field operations. He went from nine to 10 passes in the field to accomplishing the same thing in one or two passes. Silva owns one Wilcox Eliminator.

AVAILABLE UNITS: 17 FT. - 21 FT. FOLDING FRAME 13FT. - 21 FT. RIGID FRAME



THE WILCOX
ELIMINATOR



Wilcox Performer

WANT TO TRY REDUCED TILLAGE?

The Conservation Tillage work group at the University of California Extension has a number of implements on loan. If you could like to try conservation tillage on a limited basis, please contact Jeff Mitchell at (559) 303-9689. We can also put you in touch with experienced growers or custom farmers in your area to help you get going!

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other cases it has been 2 to 5 percent increase.

Complicated

False. It is a very basic process. "We do not do anything special," notes Barcellos. With so much less equipment running, ample time is available to monitor the crop needs.

Expensive Equipment

False. You do not need to buy new equipment. "All you need is a basic planter. A coulter attachment can bolt on the front of the planter. If you want to purchase a strip till bar that can also be attached or run separately," says Barcellos. He notes that he has not bought a cultivator bearing in seven years.

A GPS guided tractor is a huge benefit, especially for traffic control to reduce compaction, but there are people doing it without.

Roundup Ready Seed

False. "We use roundup ready seed, but it's not a must, just cheap insurance," notes Barcellos. A pre-emergence spray can also work in some cases.

More Irrigation

False. You use a whole lot less water at pre-irrigation, but water timing is critical. It softens the soil up for root growth. "You have to change your ideas about irrigation. You need to pre-irrigate and then come back with a second irrigation to keep the moisture level high in the root zone," says Barcellos.

Start water immediately after chopping. Planting can start in five to six days. At planting put starter fertilizer on at the same time, this is critical to success, notes Barcellos. Ten to 12 days later the corn should be up and you should put the next irrigation on.

"Depending upon weed growth

you may consider treating, with roundup," he says. "Because you haven't disturbed the soil, whatever weeds are there are there, so herbicide is very effective." Depending on timing use a side dress, use a coulter instead of a shank so there will be minimal disturbance of the soil.

The turnaround time between crops has greatly improved since we switched to conservation tillage. Last April, we were chopping wheat and the field was wet enough, that within three hours of chopping the wheat the field was planted with the next crop. With conventional tillage it would have been two to three weeks before we were able to plant the next crop. This is the exception, notes Barcellos, however this is also the kind of opportunity that exists with conservation tillage.



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TILLAGE NEWSLETTER

Sustainable Conservation

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