



Conservation Technology Information Center

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NATIONAL SURVEY SHOWS MORE FARMERS CHOOSE CONSERVATION

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. -- Today there is more conservation in agriculture than ever before. More American farmers are choosing environmentally responsible management, protecting the land and improving the efficiency of their operations while adding to their bottom line.

The 2004 National Crop Residue Management Survey (Survey), released this week, confirms that 41 percent of all cropland is under a conservation tillage system, meaning that farmers leave the stubble or residue from the previous crop to cover at least one-third of the soil's surface after planting. No-till, the most environmentally friendly production system, is used to the greatest extent, covering 62.4 million acres in 2004. By leaving the crop residue and reducing or eliminating tillage trips, farmers protect the soil from water and wind erosion, conserve moisture, reduce runoff, improve wildlife habitat, and limit output of labor, fuel and machinery.

The Survey, last completed in 2002 and coordinated by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) in partnership with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a biennial survey of tillage systems used in the U.S.

With a no-till system, most of the soil is undisturbed, and seeds are placed into the soil with minimal soil and residue disturbance. The Survey reports that no-till acres increased 7.1 million acres to 62.4 million, up from 55.3 million acres in 2002. That means no-till is used on almost 23 percent of all cropland in the country, up from 20 percent in 2002 and 17.5 percent in 2000.

Bob Rawlings has been using no-till on his Georgia farm for many years. For him, no-till is the only way to grow corn, cotton, peanuts and even watermelons while improving the soil biology .

“One needs to understand how important soil biology is in order to improve one's dirt. And the soil biology can't function properly when one plows,” Rawlings says. “God put a cover on every productive acre in the world, and we shouldn't leave the soil naked.”

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Dan Towery, NRCS natural resources specialist who organizes data collection from each county in the U.S. says, "This Survey documents the fact that farmers are able to increase soil productivity, protect the environment and, at the same time, make a profit. With conservation tillage being used on 113 million acres, up nearly 10 million acres from 2002, we know that more farmers than ever before are using conservation."

The Survey not only provides a snapshot of tillage usage for a year, it also tracks trends in adoption of conservation tillage over time. Larry Clemens, Midwest agricultural team leader with The Nature Conservancy, is encouraged with the growing number of acres managed with conservation in mind. For example, a Nature Conservancy priority watershed in northern Indiana reported 80 percent no-till soybeans (18 percent higher than the state average) and 55 percent no-till corn (36 percent higher than the state average) in 2004. No-till, he says, is part of a system of farm management practices that improves the soil, which means better crops. It also enables the soil to better act like a sponge and reduce runoff from cropland.

"By using no-till, farmers are in effect creating a better sponge out of their soil. Over time the soil holds more water. So with less runoff from cropland, the nearby rivers and streams have better water quality and better habitat for aquatic species. Plus, increased soil organic matter improves nutrient and water-holding capacity for crops," says Clemens.

The greatest increase in no-till acres occurred in South Dakota -- over 2 million acres of no-till have been added since 2000. The reason, says Dwayne Beck of Dakota Lakes Research Farm, is economics. No-till systems with diverse crop rotations are economically superior to conventional farming in South Dakota. This is especially true in dry years because not tilling the ground saves valuable soil moisture.

"No-till has become the competitive edge here. Farmers have figured out the best crop rotation and pesticide program, and they are out-competing the conventional tillers for the land," says Beck.

For more information about the 2004 National Crop Residue Management Survey, contact CTIC at (765) 494-9555 or go to www.ctic.purdue.edu. The Conservation Technology Information Center, based in West Lafayette, Ind., is a trusted, credible source of technology and information about improving soil quality.

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Conservation Tillage Adoption in the U.S.
1994 - 2004

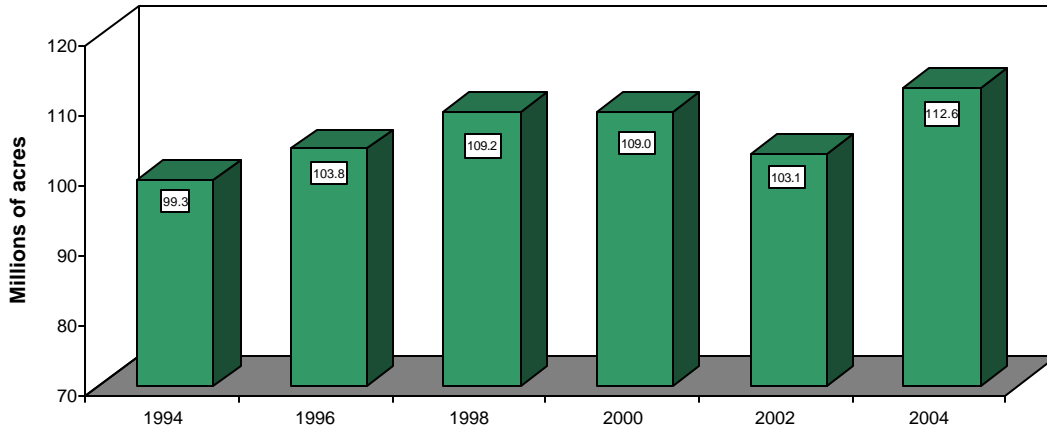


Fig. 1 Conservation Tillage Adoption in the U.S.
After four years of decline, conservation tillage adoption increased in 2004.
Source: Conservation Technology Information Center

No-Till Adoption in the U.S.
1994 - 2004

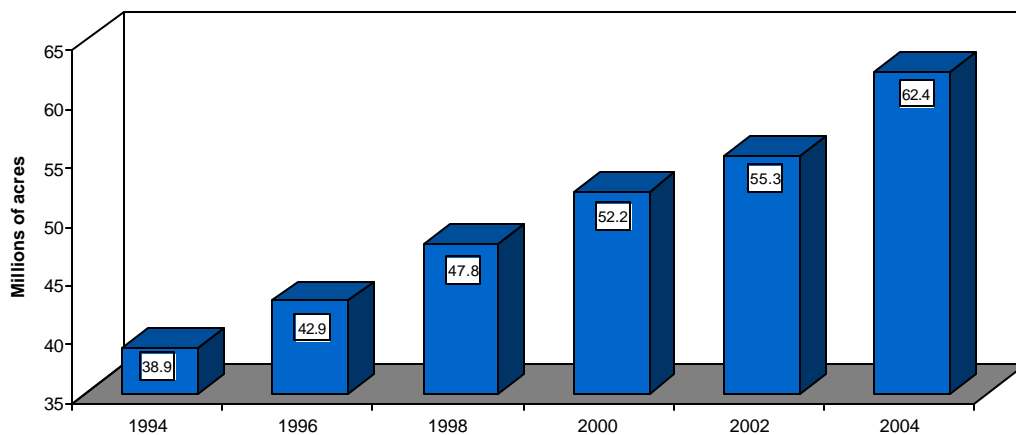


Fig. 2 No-Till Adoption in the U.S.
No-till adoption continues to steadily rise. This represents almost 23 percent of the nation's cropland.
Source: Conservation Technology Information Center

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SIDEBAR

The Survey says...

According to the 2004 National Crop Residue Management Survey, coordinated by the Conservation Technology Information Center, the top no-till states (in million acres) for 2004 are:

Illinois	6.7
Iowa	5.2
South Dakota	5.0
Indiana	4.6
Ohio	4.4
Nebraska	4.3
Kansas	4.2
North Dakota	3.3
Missouri	3.1
Montana	2.0

Number of acres (in million acres) of no-till by crop:

No-till soybeans	29.3
No-till corn	15.8
No-till winter wheat	6.7
No-till spring small grains	4.4
No-till cotton	2.4
No-till sorghum	1.7