

# THE LEADING EDGE

[www.yetterco.com](http://www.yetterco.com) · [Yetter Manufacturing Inc](http://www.yetterco.com) · [E-mail:info@yetterco.com](mailto:info@yetterco.com)

**A PUBLICATION DEDICATED TO MAXIMIZING YIELD POTENTIAL**

**The best of both worlds**

***In a year of extremely wet or dry soil, strip-till offers advantages.***



Tilled, residue-free strips warm up the seedbed while the remaining untilled soil retains moisture.

Every year, producers face unique challenges. Whether it is too cool and wet or too warm and dry, it can seem like there is no such thing as a perfect year for growing. Strip-tilling, often praised as eco-friendly and cost-saving, can also help producers prepare for weather extremes.

The general advantages of strip-tilling are well documented. Those looking to save on fuel, labor, fertilizer and machinery costs associated with conventional tillage will find the reduced passes with strip-tilling very attractive.

And those worried about reduced seed zone temperatures and wet soils associated with no-till will find strip-till leads to warmer, drier seedbeds. Strip-till offers the best of both worlds, combining the best aspects of conventional tillage with the benefits of no-till.

### **An attractive alternative**

Strip-till offers savings in fuel, labor, fertilizer, and machinery compared to conventional till. With fewer passes, fuel, labor, and machinery costs are saved, and by placing fertilizer in the root zone fertilizer usage is reduced.

**"We've saved 40% on our fertilizer cost by banding instead of broadcasting it. That's in line with what other strip-tillers are saying about their fertilizer savings," says Floyd Koerner III, who strip-tills corn and soybeans in Laingsburg, Michigan.**

[No-Till Farmer, April 1, 2011](#)

Of course, these cost savings would be of no value if yields were significantly lower than other tillage methods. However, research shows that strip-till generally produces yields similar to or slightly higher than no-till and similar to conventional tillage. In addition, yields from strip-tilled fields have been proven to increase over time.

In both wet or dry soil, strip-till has additional advantages besides similar-to-higher yields and cost savings. Strip-tilling can help create the perfect seedbed: the tilled, residue-free strips warm up the seedbed while the remaining untilled soil (covered with residue) retains moisture. These conditions lead to uniform plant emergence and growth.

### **Advantages to strip-tilling in wet soil**

In years with heavy rains, producers can waste valuable time in the spring waiting for soils to dry out enough to plant. Strip-tilling forms a soil ridge

which facilitates drainage and invites warming, creating the perfect soil conditions for planting. Warmer soil limits the profit-robbing effect that cold, wet soil and delayed planting can have on yields. Instead, loose, warm soil encourages rapid root development, allowing quicker contact with bands of nutrients to jump-start yield potential.



Strip-till can give crops a jump start in the spring.

In soils that are too heavy, wet, and cold for no-till farming, strip-till is an attractive alternative. For example, in the cool, wet year of 2009, strip-till gave the crops a head start and a warmer seedbed over no-till, according to a study by the Conservation Cropping Systems Project. i.

While strip-till has the advantage over no-till in warming up soil, it also retains the benefits of no-till. For example, strip-till creates soil-holding benefits similar to no-till, reducing erosion, while increasing organic matter.

### **Advantages to strip-tilling in dry soil**

While strip-till always offers producers reduced input costs and financial incentives, there is an extra bonus in dry years—increased yields. Many years, water availability is the most important factor limiting crop yield. Strip-till aids by retaining moisture and reducing the need for irrigation. In fact, strip-till may be able to significantly stretch water supplies, as it has been proven that strip-tilled fields absorb water much more quickly and

retain it at a considerably higher rate.

### **The right equipment makes a difference**



Strip-till is not one-size-fits-all, so choose versatile equipment that you can adapt depending on the season and field.

To maximize the benefits of strip-till, the right equipment makes all the difference. A combine spreader for adequate residue distribution and a chopper to handle tough residue are essential to preparing an ideal seedbed that warms quickly in the spring. Residue that has been sized and properly distributed reduces the chance of plugging.

Residue management and coultter tillage are also important steps in effective strip tillage. Residue management creates a clean seedbed for planting, and proper tillage methods ensure an ideal seedbed for the next year. Working together, they loosen and warm the soil, creating an environment that promotes seed growth and health.

Appropriate knife selection is also an integral part of the process. The correct knife can be determined by:

- Amount of required or acceptable soil disturbance.
- Depth of operation.
- Type of fertilizer being applied.

- Ground speed.
- Time of year of application.

Finally, there are a wide variety of sealing and closing options available to suit the needs of every operation. Producers strip-tilling in heavy residue or wet soil conditions have frequently faced challenges effectively closing the knife opening. New tools address this concern and offer producers options to match any soil condition. Heavy residue and wet conditions requires equipment that offers flexibility in sealer adjustments for width, pitch, and distance from the row.

### **Consider the important questions**

Are you concerned about the up-front costs and erosion associated with conventional tillage? Worried about the wet soils and cool seedbed of no-till? Strip-till may be right for you. With the right equipment, you will be ready to take full advantage of the benefits of strip-tilling in a year of extremely wet or dry weather. Cost savings, yield improvement, and a better seedbed are just a few of the advantages you can expect with strip-tilling, even in a year with less-than-ideal weather.

i. "North Dakota Reports—Strip-Till Did Overcome the Cool and Wet Year of 2009," NDSU-Oakes Experiment Station, March 5, 2010.

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Yetter Manufacturing Co., Inc.  
109 S. McDonough  
Colchester, Illinois 62326  
Phone: 800-447-5777  
FAX: 309-776-3222  
www.yetterco.com  
E-mail: info@yetterco.com



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