

## Buck Tradition for Better Outcomes

### *Strip-tillage may provide the solution for your operation*

Sometimes a reliable standby, like the rotary hoe, will prove to be the best solution for a farmer's operation. Occasionally, though, it pays off to buck tradition to find a new process that produces better outcomes. Take strip-tilling. In the grand scheme of things, strip-till is a farming practice that hasn't been around for very long. However, the long-term benefits of this practice, especially on erosion-prone land, are undeniable.

### Benefits and savings of strip-till

Strip-tilling creates the perfect seedbed: the tilled, residue-free strips warm up the soil while the remaining untilled soil covered with residue retains moisture. These conditions lead to uniform plant emergence and growth.

Strip-till gives you some of the benefits of leaving surface residue on the ground and does not cause an excessive amount of disturbance. Leaving residue on the ground over the winter helps increase organic matter as the residue decomposes, leading to improved soil quality, structure, and tilth. The residue makes the soil less prone to crust, leading to better water infiltration. At the same time, the residue catches more snow, further improving water infiltration. Wind erosion is virtually eliminated, water erosion is significantly reduced, and weed growth may be limited as well. According to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, conservation tillage "Reduces soil erosion by as much as 60%-90% depending on the conservation tillage method."<sup>1</sup>

Strip-till also offers savings in fuel, fertilizer, and labor. Because it requires fewer passes across the field, strip-till



*The strips of residue help to improve water infiltration and lower soil erosion.*



A tool that pairs strip-till with fertilizer application, like the [Yetter 2984 Maverick™ HR Plus](#), saves money—fertilizer is placed in the cleared strips right where it will be readily available when you plant your crop.

provides fuel and labor savings vs. conventional tillage methods. Fertilizer input costs are lowered as well since the fertilizer is placed along the rows, right in the root zone where plants need it.

### The right equipment is crucial

To optimize strip-till operations, growers depend on the right equipment. Below are some tips for selecting strip-till equipment and tools:

- For residue managers, choose models that spread residue evenly.
- Coupling strip-till with fertilizer application is a time saving option. Look for versatile equipment that can apply NH<sub>3</sub>, liquid, dry, or a combination of fertilizers into the strips while you're building the strips. Equipment that can adapt and change for your various needs is beneficial.
- When considering strip-till, also consider GPS technology. With GPS-aided guidance, it is much easier to make strips by day or night. And during planting, it is easier to plant in the center of the strip.<sup>2</sup> Companies like Trimble, AgLeader, and Raven provide systems for mapping and guidance that allow you to apply fertilizer right where you will plant in the strips, making your strip-till system more accurate and efficient.
- A chopper or stalk roller can reduce the size of residue, which helps speed residue breakdown.



*Corn emerges evenly between residue strips.*

- Vertical tillage can be paired with strip-till to improve microbe exposure and aid in residue breakdown. Vertical tillage machines are used ahead of strip-till machines to size and level the field before making strips.

If you are interested in learning more about how strip-till can help your operation and what equipment you need to get started, check out the inaugural [2014 Strip-Tillage Conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa](#). This event runs July 30-31, 2014, and will provide attendees with multiple learning experiences such as speakers and workshops. If you miss out on this year's event, don't worry—organizers are already making plans for the 2015 event.

### Endnotes

- 1 "Conservation Practices | Minnesota Conservation Funding Guide," Minnesota Department of Agriculture, June 19, 2014, <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/practices/constillage.aspx>.
- 2 K.M. Foley, C.C. Shock, O.S. Norberg, and T.K. Welch, "Making Strip Tillage Work for You: A Grower's Guide," March 2012, [http://www.cropinfo.net/Strip\\_Tillage\\_EXT\\_CrS\\_140.pdf](http://www.cropinfo.net/Strip_Tillage_EXT_CrS_140.pdf) accessed June 19, 2014.

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