

CROPS

How to select right tillage tools

By **TOM J. BECHMAN**

JOHN Spangler found himself in an awkward position at the Farm Progress Show. On one hand, it was a great opportunity to see various tillage tools in action. And like many Midwestern farmers, he's interested in tillage in corn after corn. But reality said the Marietta, Ill., farmer's budget is limited. He couldn't just say, "I'll take one of these and one of those." Farm Progress stayed at Spangler's

Key Points

- Handling residue becomes crucial in corn after corn.
- Balance the gain a tool offers with its cost.
- How much residue an implement leaves depends on how it's operated.

side. Nearly two dozen different implements passed by. Here's what he looked for: First and foremost, how much tillage

does it do? Spangler needs a tool that can cut through stalks and bury some residue, yet not too much. To consider buying it, a tool must be better than his current tools.

"I want something that does a good job in one pass," he noted. "I also want one that leaves the ground level."

Although the dark, heavy loam soil was bone dry, there were still differences between tools. Some cut through residue better, and there was a wide range in amount of residue left. That's



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: Case IH's Mel Blunier gives John Spangler a firsthand look at new tillage tools. Spangler has one question in mind: How much residue will each tool leave?

OK, Spangler said, because different farmers look for different end results. Some likely want more residue left than he does. His goal is getting a high percentage covered so it can begin breaking down.



Trade-offs

After watching several implements, Spangler concluded one would be best in the fall, while another would be ideal for spring. Switching to two new tillage tools wasn't doable.

About that time he struck up a conversation with Mel Blunier, representing Case IH, part of CNH America LLC. His specialty is tillage tools.

"How you run the tool affects how much residue you leave," Blunier noted. But he added that some tools are more suited to leaving variable amounts of residue than others. Later that day, Blunier brought back a couple of Case IH tillage tools to prove his point.

There are typically some adjustments in setting implements that affect residue cover, Blunier explained. "You can often have more impact by varying driving speed or direction of travel," he added. "If you run at a 45-degree angle, the amount of residue left varies versus running straight with the rows." Spangler watched and soon agreed.

One drawback to evaluating tillage tools at a farm show is each tool may not work in the same environment, Blunier emphasized. "Since different combines were used, it's not a level playing field."

Spangler didn't decide that day. Demonstrations helped him gather information. His next move would be discovering what a new tool could do that he couldn't do already. Then he would determine if that translates into enough economic gain to make a change.

Note: John Spangler is the spouse of Holly Spangler, field editor for Prairie Farmer, a Farm Progress publication.



RESIDUE CONTROL: Blunier (right) explains to Spangler that residue cover depends on how an implement is run.



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