

November 2007

Southern FARMER®

25 ways to hike
corn yield Page 17



Tobacco's new strip

By PAM GOLDEN

THERE was a time when stripping tobacco meant pulling off the leaves, but that's no longer what it means to Jeff Davis.

To this Kentucky farmer, stripping tobacco means less erosion, fewer trips across the field, cleaner tobacco at harvest and higher yield. The trade-off is slightly higher cost for weed control.

Not bad, Davis figures, when yields are up about 500 pounds an acre.

"I believe it's quite a bit of savings," Davis says. To prepare the ground, Davis runs a strip-till machine with fertilizer boxes across the field, and then comes back with a Multivator, which he describes as a \$10,000 garden tiller on a tool bar.

"It gets the ground just like you would with conventional, but it's just a narrow strip," he says. "We're trying to get the strip down as narrow as we can."

Since he started strip tilling three years ago, Davis has made minor modifications to the Multivator, such as turning the tines on each of the four rows so all are facing in. That's helped him on his quest to work down from the 14-inch strip he started with to a 10-inch strip.

Davis strip tilled about a third of his tobacco crop the first year. He's now 100% strip till in his burley and air-cured tobacco. He also grows about 1,160 acres of corn, beans and wheat.

Not only do the narrow strips reduce erosion, but Davis also sees improved moisture retention — a definite plus during the droughty 2007 season.

In a year not plagued by drought, Davis notes, using strip tillage helps keep the ground between the rows from becoming mud holes after a rain.

"After a rain, you can get in the field

Key Points

- Jeff Davis uses strip tillage to grow 240 acres of tobacco.
- Strip tillage reduces erosion, increases yield and cuts trips.
- Weed control expenses increase in a strip-tillage system.

quicker," he says. "If you get blue mold coming in, you can get right in and spray it."

Davis hasn't changed anything on his insect control program, but weed treatment is different.

In 2007, he sprayed Roundup for burndown in early April, about a month before planting into wheat stubble and fields where he harvested late soybeans. He then applied Roundup, 6 ounces of Spartan and 1.5 pints of Prowl in a tankmix ahead of the setter. Seven days later he came over the top with a pint of Command.

To combat resistant marestalk, Davis plans to add 2,4-D to his burndown treatment in 2008.

One of the bonuses to the industry is strip till in tobacco opens the door for young farmers to get started with minimal equipment in a profitable crop.

"It's hard for a young guy to get into farming," Davis says. "With this system, you can raise a little tobacco for about \$50,000."

■ To read more about conservation tillage in burley and flue-cured tobacco, turn to Pages 6-7.

NEIGHBORLY ADVICE: Jeff Davis of Pembroke, Ky., credits fellow farmer Todd Harton of Cadiz, Ky., with leading him to strip till his tobacco. Davis now uses Harton's strip-tillage machine in his fields.



FARM FUTURES

2007 Management Summit
December 11-12

Two day program/Top industry speakers

www.farmfutures.com/seminar