

Help for no-till, strip till

By CAROL BROWN

BECAUSE the Iowa Learning Farm partners with state and federal agencies, it enables people within the ILF project to expand capabilities and networks and enact change on the land more quickly.

The No-till/Strip-till Initiative through the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Division of Soil Conservation is one example. Jim Gillespie, field services bureau chief, started it in the spring of 2008 in the counties of Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto and Pocahontas to offer incentives for farmers who don't already use no-till or strip till. The three-year program provides a small payment for up to 200 acres to be strip tilled or no-tilled.

"I'm thrilled with the first-year participation and support the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and staff have provided," he says. "We started the project to help farmers realize the soil quality benefits and to help them understand the management benefits related to residue cover. We had 24 participants last year and are offering the opportunity for new participants this year."

The initiative may expand to other districts in areas where biomass ethanol production uses crop residue as a resource. In an area being pressured for harvesting residue, recognizing the value of soil quality by keeping more residue on the land is vital. Gillespie says the project's future rests in how participants adopt these practices for sustainability. Farmers must realize the long-term benefits of increased organic matter and reduced soil erosion are positive effects beyond dollar savings.

Need more no-till, strip till

Iowa State University Extension agronomist Mahdi Al-Kaisi supports this effort.

"Using conservation systems that sustain soil productivity and improve environmental quality has to be considered," he says. "Residue removal for bioenergy or other uses, such as livestock feed or bedding, can have a significant impact on soil productivity and quality. The continuous removal of residue coupled with intensive tillage is well-documented to have a negative impact."

The ILF offers opportunities such as field days and workshops, where farmers can get answers and feedback from other farmers who are using these practices.

In early March ILF presented a planter clinic in Emmetsburg offering tips on how to convert a planter to work in fields with higher amounts of residue. In addition to machinery guidelines, a farmer panel of longtime no-tillers took questions from attendees on specifics, such as fertilizer application and how certain challenges were met.

Within the No-till/Strip-till Initiative, the IDALS soil conservation division offers guidance and mentoring so farmers aren't flying solo. Another tool Gillespie recommends is I-FARM.



I-FARM is a handy tool

"We want to work with our participants getting them to use I-FARM, a free Internet planning and management tool to help farmers understand the implications of tillage from a soil quality standpoint," says Gillespie. "It will also help them make better economic de-

isions for their farming operations."

ILF and its partners encourage a combination of conservation practices, including the use of grassed waterways, buffer strips, stream bank stabilization and cover crops, in addition to reducing tillage to achieve maximum results.

Brown is communications specialist for the Iowa Learning Farm.

Learn more

CONTACT the SWCD office in Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto and Pocahontas counties for more information on the No-till/Strip-till Initiative. Benefits include lower fuel and improved soil health. I-FARM is a free Internet tool to help understand the implications of tillage from soil quality and economic standpoints. Visit i-farmtools.org to explore more.

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Farmers across the country were recently introduced to Genuity™, Monsanto's new family of traits designed to simplify farmers' trait selection to best meet the needs of their farms.

Many farmers are already expressing excitement for the brand. "With so many technologies on the market, it can become mind-boggling at times," says fourth-generation Brownton, Minnesota, farmer Joe Griebie, who has been growing corn and soybeans for 35 years. "I would imagine that the new system with Genuity™ will make it easier for me to identify the right traits for my farm."

Shirley, Illinois, farmer Mike Olson agrees. "The biotechnology traits that we look at must be of economic value to us," he says. "Any traits that help us economically or are less labor-intensive are traits that we are going to look at, and it sounds as though Genuity™ will help us to identify those traits."

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Genuity™ will encompass Monsanto's latest corn, soybean, cotton and specialty crop traits, as well as future trait technologies in Monsanto's research and development pipeline.

"Monsanto's science is only as good as the solutions and the value our seeds provide to farmers," says Ernesto Fajardo, Monsanto Vice President-U.S. Commercial. "That is why we felt we needed a new system of Genuity™ traits, to simplify and more clearly connect our traits with the farmers who value them. Genuity™ will help farmers make the connection between the traits they know and trust and the new trait technologies that will be introduced in the future."

"Genuity™ gives us the opportunity to position our traits as a family of innovative products that will enable farmers to do what they do best, even better," Fajardo adds.

"With all the new products available today, I'm hoping that this new system will simplify things a little bit," says Jeff Hosted of Albion, Indiana. "It can be challenging at times to decipher all the different traits and keep straight what they do for us. It sounds like Genuity™ will make this simpler and remove some of the guesswork."

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