



2104 Agronomy Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-1010
515-294-8912
www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf

"Building a Culture of Conservation ~ Farmer to Farmer: Iowan to Iowan"

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Carol L. Brown, communications specialist, 515-294-8912
John Lundvall, ILF field coordinator, 515-294-5429

Operation Strip-Till gets rolling

AMES, Iowa – A couple of north central Iowa men put their heads together and created an opportunity for farmers interested in trying strip-tillage on their farms. Iowa Learning Farm cooperater Dave Nelson, owner of Brokaw Supply Company, and Doug Seltz, a Webster County Soil and Water District commissioner, conceived a way for area producers to get their toes wet in the strip-tilling world without taking the full plunge. They're calling it "Operation Strip Till."

Operation Strip-Till is the coordination of a leased tractor, strip-till machine and two equipment operators. The strip-till machine will match up with either 12- or 16-row planter sizes, will be equipped for fall application of anhydrous and dry fertilizer, and use GPS auto-steer so rows will be straight for spring 2009 planting. For a fee (to cover equipment rental only), farmers can have a portion of their acres strip-tilled.

An Operation Strip-Till seminar was held on March 17 at the Webster County Fairgrounds, Fort Dodge, to introduce farmers to this opportunity. More than 75 attended the seminar, hosted by Brokaw Supply and Webster County NRCS, and sponsored by the Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and the Iowa Learning Farm. Interested producers heard from ISU Extension Field Agronomist John Holmes, who talked about the advantages of strip-tilling which include reduced soil erosion and water run-off, fuel and time savings resulting from fewer field passes, and maintaining top-end yield potential. Mark Hanna, ISU Extension agricultural engineer, gave pointers on how strip-till equipment works within the soil profile along with proper fertilizer placement.

Kevin Kimberley, an independent consultant and farmer, presented his "do's and don'ts for strip-tilling." Kimberley is an industry-recognized expert on the subject and travels around the country helping farmers troubleshoot their in-field problems. Wrapping up the day, a three-farmer panel of area strip-tillers shared their experiences and answered questions about strip-tillage from the group.

"It was so exciting to see the great turnout and interest that we had for this meeting," said Nelson. "Everyone reads about strip-till and recognizes the many advantages it would bring to their farm. But strip-till isn't just something you hook on and go to the field with. It brings many new concepts and levels of management that people are scared to try on their own. With "Operation Strip-Till" we are all going to learn together. By recruiting local experts who have strip-tilled for many years, we can implement their successes and knowledge right from the start."

Nelson said that they received more than 1,900 committed acres by the end of the meeting. Webster County producers interested in trying out the system can call Nelson at (800) 362-1640.

Strip-tillage marries the best aspects of conventional tillage with the benefits of no-till. In the fall, the strip-tiller creates strips of exposed soil, broken up by a coulter and shank, and moves surface residue between the strips.

In the spring, the strip of exposed soil warms and dries faster than the rest of the field, making this system ideal for some Iowa soil types. The added fertilizer is applied only to the exposed row, keeping weeds at bay.

Nelson and his father, Gary, farm the Smeltzer Trust Demonstration Farm near Otho, in Webster County. This farm is used as a teaching tool, showing many different agricultural practices and conservation techniques and is one of the Iowa Learning Farm demonstration and research sites. It is the intent of Nelson to have an area of the farm where strip-tilling can be shown, where producers can watch the equipment being used, feel the soil and learn how residue is managed. They are scheduling a strip-till field day in early September at the farm.

“This part of Iowa—the Des Moines Lobe—has soils that stay cooler and wetter in the spring than the rest of the state,” said Denis Schulte, NRCS District Conservationist for Webster County. “This is why no-till has not been adopted by many producers. Strip-till is a way producers can have a warm, dry seedbed and still keep the benefits of reduced soil disturbance. Landowners should see better water infiltration and improved soil structure. This means less crop production cost for the producer, better soil qualities in the field and no loss of crop yields.” Schulte serves as a consultant for the Smeltzer Farm, offering projects for improved conservation on the farm and overseeing their progress.

If Operation Strip-Till is successful in Webster County, Nelson and Seltz hope to take it on the road, teaching others across Iowa how to set up similar programs and in turn sparking more conservation farming efforts. For more information contact Dave Nelson, 1-800-362-1640, or John Holmes, 515-532-3453.

The Iowa Learning Farm’s focus is on helping strong conservationist farmers teach other farmers about systems that will improve the quality of the soil and water on their farms, while remaining profitable and sustainable. The Iowa Learning Farm is a partnership between the Iowa Department of Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa National Resources Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Natural Resources; in cooperation with Conservation Districts of Iowa and Iowa Farm Bureau.