

Why Do Producers No-Till Wheat?

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No-tillage has been an important part of Kentucky agriculture for many years. Farmers have embraced the practice for many reasons. It first began as an erosion control practice. Something we really needed in our state. Farmers soon learned it had other benefits

which fit well into their farming operations.

Wheat was the last major grain crop to be widely accepted by producers as a no-till crop. For many years only about 25 percent of the acreage was no-tilled. However, the last 3 to 5 years this percentage has increased greatly. A survey was taken at a January wheat meeting where about 25 percent of the planted wheat acreage was represented. The response indicated that 69 percent for the wheat was planted no-till. This is almost a 3 fold increase from just a few years ago.

Why are farmers planting so much more no-till wheat now? When they were asked what was the main reason that they use no-tillage, the responses were a bit surprising to me.

The Main Reason I No-Till Wheat:

Reduces labor requirement	28.6%
Less Machinery Required	16.7%
More Timely Planting	16.7%
Erosion Control	16.7%
Increased Profits	11.9%
Reduced Stress	4.8%
Increased Yield of All Crops	4.8%

They could only pick one response, so they had

to pick the one that was most important to them. It appears that the main reason that farmer's no-till wheat is for the ease of management. The practice allows them to manage this crop with less labor, machinery and stress at planting time. When you add these 3 responses, the total is 50 percent. Timely wheat planting is a result of less labor, machinery and tillages passes over the field. When this 16.7 percent is added into the other three reasons, the combined total is 67 percent. This means that 2/3 of the people planting wheat using no-tillage, like being able to plant the crop in a timely manner with less labor, machinery and stress.

No-tillage wheat results in improved soil quality and reduced erosion, which over time, can increase yields of all crops grown on the fields. These two benefits were identified as the most important by only 21.5 percent for the respondents.

Increased profit was most important to 11.9 percent of the respondents. Indicating that there is not much of an increased profit and/or it is secondary to the other benefits.

It appears that no-tillage wheat is most helpful to producers because it helps with and reduces the demands of their day to day management at a busy time of the year. They see the benefits immediately and daily. While the longer term benefits such as less erosion, improved soil quality and improved yields on all crops are less visible and the benefits are only realized over a period of years. These benefits are just as important and probably recognized by the respondents but not as immediate and easy to see.

I would like to thank the Kentucky IPM program for making this survey possible. Δ

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