

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



## Farmers Expect 'Unbelievable' Profits from Strip-Till

Farmer Doug Seltz says he expects “unbelievable” 40 percent returns from his latest investment—a strip-till system. Iowa State University data suggest the return on his conservation tillage system will be higher.

Seltz, and his brother Kirk, recently bought a \$90,000 strip-till system for their family’s 2,100-acre Webster County farms. Figures adapted from ISU Extension’s 2008 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey report show their system will save them more than \$80,000 in tillage and fertilizer costs by 2010. That suggests in only two years they will save enough production costs to get back all but \$9,800 of their equipment investment.

These cost savings estimates do not include state and federal incentives they may be

able to receive for converting to strip-till.

District Conservationist Denis Schulte, with U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in



*Doug Seltz*

Fort Dodge, says strip-till is a conservation tillage system that offers producers reduced input costs, financial incentives and the potential for increased yields in dry years.

The cost savings can be substantial. ISU figures say strip-till can save producers \$50 an acre per year over conventional tillage in a two year corn-on-corn rotation, says Schulte. “A 100-acre field strip-tilled means the producer will likely save \$5,000 per year over the costs of conventional tillage,” he said. “That does not include expected fertilizer savings.”

Buying the strip-till equipment was not a snap decision for the Seltz brothers. Doug Seltz said he spent seven years studying the advances in strip-till equipment and technology. He’s consulted with Iowa State Extension, the Iowa Learning Farm and the Webster County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

“The time is right,” Doug Seltz said. “Strip-till technology, guidance systems and vari-



*Farmer Doug Seltz, and NRCS District Conservationist Denis Schulte examine the injection knives and coulters of a strip-till implement. Seltz recently bought a strip-till system for his Webster County farm. Seltz expects the new conservation tillage system to improve soil quality on his farm and pay for itself in about two years.*

*Helping People Help the Land*

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



able rate applicators are finally good enough to make the investment. I now look forward to enjoying the benefits of strip-till and the cost savings.”

Schulte says strip-till combines 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. The added fertilizer is applied only to the exposed row, keeping weeds at bay.

“Strip-till can be an excellent tool for keeping soil in place,” said Schulte. “Trash will likely stay in the field under a heavy rainfall because the strip is placed next to last season’s corn plant. The root ball is kept intact, holds the soil and keeps the residue from floating off into a ditch. We see strip-tillers getting almost the same soil holding benefit as do no-till farmers.”

Schulte believes strip-till makes sense for Seltz’s cropland. “Many of the soils in the Fort Dodge area are too heavy, too wet and too cold for no-till farming,” he said. “We like to recommend no-till to our clients, but no-till works best in lighter, well drained soils. Where there are cooler, poorly drained soils like those found in much of Webster County, we will likely recommend strip-till as a component of a farm’s resource management system.”

Seltz has been farming since 1974 and lives in Clare. His brother, Kirk, joined the operation in 1984. They raise corn and soybeans and are a custom hog finisher with 1200 head. They plan on strip-tilling 90 percent of their land next year. Hog manure will be injected into the remaining crop ground.

“We were raised up on conservation,” said Seltz. “Dad brought us up on ridge-till. When my dad was a SWCD commissioner, the

district bought a ridge-till planter and cultivator. Now, with strip-till, I am continuing my in dad’s tradition.”

Seltz says research tells him there will be no yield drag with strip-till. He expects yields to be very close to conventional tillage in normal years and better in dry years. In wet years, Seltz said, “Strip-till will allow me to get into my fields faster with greatly reduced compaction. Strip-till fields drain better because of the earth worm activity and we will have the added bonus of not creating a hard pan.”

Schulte encourages farmers to look at strip-till and see if it will work for them and their land. “Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) money may be available to help producers offset strip-till costs,” said Schulte. “There is also state assistance available in some counties. Total financial assistance can be as high as \$19,600 over three years, but producers should check with their local NRCS office for details.”

--30--

Seltz Strip-till Costs	
\$20,000	GPS auto steer and variable rate controller
\$70,000	Strip-till bar, cart and fertilizer tank
\$90,000	Total one time equipment cost

Seltz Strip-Till Savings vs. Conventional Tillage	
\$31,896	Eliminate machinery, fuel and labor costs by reducing field trips from six to two
\$48,300	Average fertilizer savings over two years using a targeted, variable rate fertilizer system.
\$80,196	Anticipated two-year savings

*Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist  
USDA-NRCS, Des Moines  
September 2008*