



19A

SOIL TECH NOTES Baby Steps

SITUATION:

- Not everyone that comes in to sign up for farm program or you meet out at a soil pit is necessarily ready for cover crop transition or some other “major” farming operation change.
- They still might have an interest in improving their soil health and management.
- Perfect players for “Baby Steps” or gradual steps and changes that will lead to soil improvements!

WHAT ARE SOME?

Physical Property Changes:

- Reduce tire pressure on major tractors and other larger machinery.
- Set up travel lanes in fields to reduce field crossings by harvesting equipment, grain carts, fertilizer trucks, etc.
- Don’t field cultivate or chisel before spring planting.
- Wait one more day when surface conditions are still tacky or muddy.

Chemical Property Changes:

- Know and understand residual nutrient carryover from prior year’s crop. Apply this the following crop year to fertilizer applications.
- Don’t burn your residue or stubble. Especially bean stubble. Any stubble is better than none!

Biological Property Changes:

- Be selective on cover crop choices. Read, listen and talk to those who have used them to find out what will work best for you.
- Don’t be an “every-other-year” cover crop or no-till person. The results wanted with cover crops and no-till, only come with patience and continual use.
- If location and facilities are available, spread manure as appropriate.
- Don’t fall chisel bean stubble!
- Avoid monoculture cropping systems, such as corn on corn. Crop diversity using legumes, grasses, and even a variety of commercial crops such as corn, soybeans and wheat will aid in improving microbial population and diversity of microbes.

