

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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Crop residue provides protection to soil resources

St. Paul, MN— Staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Minnesota are encouraging farmers to do less fall tillage operations. “With such an early harvest, you might be tempted to get back on that equipment and till things up a bit,” says NRCS State Conservationist William Hunt. “Too much tillage destroys good soil structure and wastes fuel. I’d ask you to do something else this fall – but leave that residue alone and let the soil quality you’ve built over the last year sit tight. Resist that urge to turn that soil over,” adds Hunt.

Whether landowners planted corn, beans, or wheat this year, leaving crop residue on the soil surface over winter is a valuable contribution to the quality of the soil and erosion protection available on the farm. For landowners committed to a no-till operation, a strip till operation, or any conservation tillage system, resisting this urge to till saves money and offers a variety of other environmental benefits. On the more poorly drained glacial till or lacustrine (lake sediment) soils of the state, University of Minnesota research has shown that fall strip tillage can produce yields similar to more conventional systems while maintaining adequate residue, thus eliminating the risk of a no-till system and keeping environmental benefits.

“It means fewer trips across the field, less wear and tear on equipment, better erosion control, improved soil quality, wildlife habitat establishment, and water quality enhancements, just to name a few,” Hunt explains.

“Nitrogen loss also represents an economic loss to producers and is detrimental to water quality at the same time,” notes Hunt. Farmers are reminded to delay fall applications of nitrogen until soils remain at least 50 degrees or cooler.

For more information about managing residue and nutrients or how tillage might impact your conservation plan, please contact your local NRCS field office located in USDA Service Centers throughout the state of Minnesota.

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