



# SOLD ON STRIP-TILL

*It has cut equipment, fuel and labor costs for farmers—all without reducing yields.*

**F**or awhile, James and Rodney Schronk thought they had made a colossal mistake. Trying to grow crops in the Texas Blacklands without tillage appeared to be nothing but a waste of money. But after harvest, they changed their minds. Yields from their no-tilled corn and wheat matched those from conventional tillage and were significantly more profitable.

That was five years ago. Little by little since then, the father-son team has expanded the use of conservation tillage. This season, they will have nearly all of their 6,300 acres of cropland near Hillsboro, Texas, under some form of conservation tillage. That includes 1,000 acres of cotton.

Yields of cotton, corn, grain sorghum and wheat have continued to hold steady. But at the same time, the Schronks can report major savings in equipment, fuel and labor costs.

“It’s been a learning curve,” Rodney concedes. “We

started out trying to do all no-till. But we found that was not the best system for the Blacklands, especially for row crops following wheat. We’re nearly always wet in the spring. With a full cover of plant residue, the ground never has a chance to dry out. We just couldn’t get good stands of cotton, corn and milo.”

The Schronks sought advice from other successful users and from John Bradley, conservation-tillage guru with Monsanto. Finally, they settled on the use of strip tillage for row crops.

“We bought a 12-row rig, and it worked real well. Later we added another 12-row unit,” Rodney reports.

This past fall, they invested in a system that covers twenty-four, 30-inch rows. Pulled at 6 mph, it will till about 35 acres an hour.

A 7-inch x 7-inch x 60-foot-wide toolbar is equipped with Yetter Maverick openers. A 20-inch-diameter smooth coulters that cuts through the plant residue follows each set of floating



Rodney Schronk can cover 35 acres an hour with this 24-row, strip-tillage rig.

PHOTOS: DEL DETERLING

Residue Manager row cleaners. And a mole knife opens a 6-inch-deep trench for anhydrous ammonia tubes.

Two 16-inch-diameter, concave disks close the trench and build a slight berm. The Schronks plant into the berm in the spring.

“This has really simplified and speeded up planting,” Rodney explains. “All of the time-consuming operations are done in the fall. In the spring, we can focus on getting seed into the ground.”

Anhydrous ammonia is applied in the fall. Phosphate and trace elements are applied in-furrow at planting with one of the Schronks’ three, 12-row Kinze planters with double-disk openers.

“All of our cotton and corn are Roundup Ready varieties, so we apply only Roundup herbicide postemergence,” Rodney adds. “We do apply a preemergence herbicide to milo.”

Yields continue to be equal to those from conventional tillage (about 1 bale per acre for cotton) and are consistent from year to year. The big advantage is cost savings.

“Strip-till cut our fuel costs in half,” Rodney reports. “We’re using the same amount of fuel now to grow 6,300 acres as we were when we farmed only 3,000 acres.”

He estimates labor costs to be down from \$12.50 per acre to \$8 an acre. Rodney and his father also employ Rodney’s brother Derek and two part-time workers. Conventional tillage would require at least two more full-time employees.

“Also, we have a lot less invested in equipment. We sold several of our larger tractors and plows,” Rodney continues. “We have four large tractors that we use for primary tillage, plus several smaller ones that we use for general purposes.”

On the other hand, herbicide costs are up by about 25%. But Rodney believes these costs can be reduced as they fine-tune their system.

“Right now, we probably overspend on herbicides because we want to keep our landlords happy,” he explains.

“Strip-till and no-till still have a reputation for being a lazy man’s way of farming,” he adds. “We explain to our landlords that although we are plowing less, conservation tillage actually requires more intensive management. But in the meantime, we are careful to maintain weed-free fields.”

—*Del Deterling*

## for more info

To learn more about Yetter Maverick and Residue Manager, contact Yetter Manufacturing Co., P.O. Box 358, Colchester, IL 62326; call 309-776-4111; e-mail [info@yetterco.com](mailto:info@yetterco.com); or visit [www.yetterco.com](http://www.yetterco.com).