

Leading Edge

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No·till
On The Plains

Fix the Weak Link

by Matt Hagny

David Gillen progresses quietly, almost by stealth. For someone who's won awards for top farm management, you might expect a cagey personality with hurricane bluster. Not David. Calmly, almost serenely, he reflects on what the biggest problem is, and then gets to work researching and fixing it. Problems are to be solved, and then move on. No time for second-guessing or reviewing a catalogue of old issues. Forward!

David, who farms near White Lake, SD with his wife Carol and their



children, took that same studious approach to no-till adoption back in early '90s. His interest in no-till was first piqued when he heard Dwayne Beck at a SCS meeting back in '87, who stated that you could farm successfully with a planter, sprayer, and a combine. David says it took two years for him to completely grasp that message. In the fall of '90, Gillen heard several "ecofallow" presentations, whose cautioning message was to try no-till on a "small acreage." Gillen was sufficiently intrigued that he spent the winter researching the possibility, and concluded that the right thing to do was "jump in with both feet." He sold all of his tillage equipment that spring.

Gillen had done his homework, and the move was nicely executed. "Results were well above my expectations. Planting conditions were so much better. I had more time available. And for the first time, I could pull my living expenses from grain farming instead of from the livestock No-till has been a huge success story for my farm. It allowed me to triple my acres without increasing labor. My yields are higher, and inputs reduced."

Fifteen years ago, Gillen's region in south-central South Dakota was 2/3 tame grass (pasture or hay land) and



Photo by David Gillen.

Gillen's 22-inch rows and other good agronomic practices create an incredible canopy.

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