

The Junior Scientist

by Roger Long

Spending time on the Griebel farm west of Stockton, KS is a little like stepping into a college farm management textbook. Their decisions are never based upon one simple variable, but instead reflect numerous aspects of agronomy and economics available to everyone, although seldom put to full use. For Griebels, that's only where it starts to get interesting. They derive real advantages from lessons learned with on-farm research—from detailed records capturing the data, to skilled analysis to sleuth out the nuances and implications.

The Griebels rely upon personally collected electronic data to guide the next year's game plan. They routinely practice what so many college professors, economists, and farm magazines preach—and Griebels do it all with 21st-century technology. Ask a question, and you will never get a single answer; everything revolves around multiple variables. Fill in the variables—the soil type, the fertility report, the previous crop and its yield—and now, after consulting the data and doing the calculations, John Griebel, Jr. is ready with a reliable response. His Palm Pilot is always at the ready, tracking every operation, application, and input purchase. A database John built allows quick and consistent data entry into the Palm, which is easily and routinely downloaded to his desktop—data that don't simply disappear into a black hole, but data that are readily retrieved for analysis to guide the next decision.



Those data and decisions flow through a father/son team who've come to relish their no-till; where fields with dense residue are prized, and sparsely covered fields are built to a new plan. John Griebel, Sr. returned to the established family farm in 1967, after being away for a few years. John Griebel, Jr. also gained experience off the farm—his in the banking industry at 1st Interstate Bank (now Wells Fargo) in Denver. John Senior's dad, an early conservationist, was one of the first in the area to buy an undercutter, in 1961. Leap ahead 43 years and John, Jr. is now in his 9th year of continuous no-till. Senior still keeps a watchful eye over the workings and lends moral and physical support, but Junior is now the CEO with ideas churning about where to head next.

John, Jr. and his father point to no-till meetings and the success of other no-tillers that led them to convert to no-till. Be assured, an old 486 desktop spit out countless “what ifs” before any purchases took place. Along with economics, the Griebels saw the need to be good stewards: “We wanted to leave these fields in better condition than when we took them over.” No doubt a plan for the next generation of Griebels!

With facts in hand, the switch began

in 1995 when Griebels bought a Great Plains drill and no-till planted their wheat that fall. They haven't done any tillage since. In 1999 they replaced the Great Plains with their current Flexi-coil air drill with Barton

Economics wasn't the only factor pushing Griebels toward no-till: “We wanted to leave these fields in better condition than when we took them over.”

openers and continue to use that drill today. John points out that they've made some minor alterations such as removing the scrapers on the fertilizer openers, and fabricating some holders for the fertilizer delivery tubes. John has been eyeing some other makes of air drills, but is postponing that expenditure until the drought breaks.

Griebel's rotation has evolved into a wheat >>wheat >>milo >>milo >>soybean rotation, sometimes with corn replacing the first milo.



Griebels' milo. Note the alternating hybrid strips—the yield maps tell the tale. Extensive on-farm testing gives Griebel an advantage.

Photo by John Griebel.