

# One Little Victory

by Roger Long

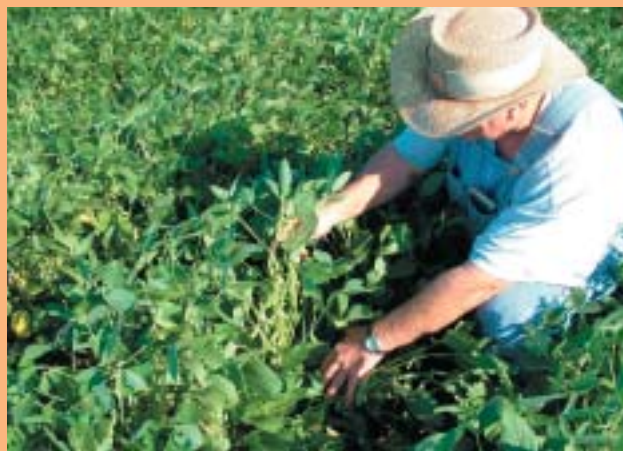
David Young was one of the South Dakota tour participants who made the journey in 1998, and it forever changed the way he farms. “I came back and told my brothers and Dad that that’s the way we should be doing things.”



Young’s great-grandfather homesteaded one of the quarters that David and his two brothers, Larry and Gary, farm today near Blackwell, Oklahoma. The same pioneering spirit so prominent in his grandfather is alive and well in David today. Like many early no-tillers, David faced the resistance-to-change inertia from both family and community—we’ve all heard the typical tirade: “My dad farmed this way, and his dad farmed this way . . .” But David was ready for a better way. “We just weren’t mak-

ing any money—something *had* to change!”

Upon returning from South Dakota, David recollects, “After three hours of talking, I finally had them convinced.” Or so he thought. The next step of putting actions to plans hit a little snag. While David was ready to put the entire farm, or at least an entire *field* to no-till, “Dad thought we should try a much smaller acreage.” They settled on a 30-acre strip out of a quarter. Thankfully, that 30-acre test plot of no-till soybeans in ’98 outyielded the tilled part of the field by a whopping one bu/a. Additional proof would have to be supplied to convince some of the Youngs, but they had begun their trek towards total no-till.



David examines his soybeans.

Photo by Roger Long.

in the heart of ‘maximum-till’ wheat country are now following Youngs’ lead and converting their fields to no-till. “Some guys that I thought would be in their grave before they converted to no-till have now made the change. . . . This [crop diversity] has been a complete turnaround. This county was nearly 100% wheat not that long ago.



Photo by Roger Long.

David points to earthworm castings—the worms gobble up his corn residue quickly. David has noticed increased earthworm activity in his soils any time he has corn residue. He attributes much of the positive response of crops that follow corn to the earthworms and the root structure of corn.

As we drove through the countryside admiring what plentiful rain can do for any cropping system, David pointed out numerous fields converted to no-till in the last few years. The tilled fields near Blackwell looked good, but the no-till fields often looked better yet. One of Youngs’ poorer 70-acre upland fields of corn that had looked ‘burned up’ earlier was harvested in mid-August and averaged 112 bu/a. David considers ’04 to be a bumper crop of corn, and by late August they had harvested a major portion of their acres, with field averages ranging from 45 to 174 bu/a (the low end was from hail at tasselling).

Growers who initially scoffed at no-till and crops like corn and soybeans

## “No-till saved our farm.”

What a drastic change in fifteen years.” David estimates his county to be 60% no-till already—truly an exceptional county in Oklahoma. A small beam of pride is evident as David knows he played a small part in improving others’ livelihoods as well as the surrounding soils and environment—and maybe a little redemption for doing what was right back in ’98 and going against the norm.

When first meeting David Young, you are comforted by his patience and jovial grandfather-like nature. And while gentle in demeanor, this veteran Oklahoma producer is tena-