

Leading Edge

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No·till
On The Plains

Managing His Ecology

by Matt Hagny

Eastern Colorado farmer Gary Maskus quietly hones his craft: bio-engineering. No, not with test tubes, gene guns, and DNA markers, but with carefully assembled crop rotations and maximum residue cover. In the heart of winter wheat >>>summerfallow country, Maskus grows a diversity of plants, including corn, proso millet, and sunflowers, along with wheat. He makes cropping decisions within the framework of biological principles, knowing that each of those choices impacts the



soil and subsequent crops far into the future.

Not much is ordinary about Gary, who has an Electrical Engineering degree and worked for 15 years in the software industry—first in the Los Angeles, California area and later based in Boulder, CO. In '96, he and his wife decided to take over the family farm near Arriba (120 miles east of Denver). Tired of the jet-set, Maskus thought he'd try life in the slow lane.

But Gary didn't waltz into retirement, nor did he inherit a massive farm operation on which to milk the

equity. He needed to support himself and his family with crop production in the wildly variable climate of the frequently parched High Plains. So he did what came naturally—he engineered something better. “Having a technological background taught me some things: Apply a *different* solution to the problem, rather than beating it with a stick in the same old way.”

Maskus has assembled an efficient low-risk production system by dint of shrewd investigation, both of his own experiences and testing, and that of others. His thoughts turned toward no-till as he attended events such as



Photo by Melody Maskus.

Maskus seeding wheat Sept. '05 using a neighbor's 20-ft. 750 on 7.5-inch spacing.

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