

Leading Edge

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No-till
On The Plains

Everyday Heroes

by Roger Long

During his lengthy political career, Bob Dole was known for his work ethic, perennial optimism, integrity, and great humility. Dole grew up in Russell, KS, which he strongly credits for instilling the positive traits ascribed to him. Maybe there *is* something in the local water that confers these characteristics—Robert Olson, also of Russell, embodies many of those same qualities that took Dole to the U.S. Senate. Positive and upbeat, confident yet humble, accurately sums up the central Kansas no-tiller. Olson is the quintessential friendly-but-understated personality from



the rural populace: “I know I don’t have all the answers. I’ve got two ears and one mouth so I figure I better listen more than I talk.”

But don’t confuse Olson’s soft-spoken manner with complacency—Olson is constantly looking for ways to improve his system, for tools to pinch out a few more bushels, and for techniques to gain efficiencies. It was his quest for a better way that led Olson to no-till, after having used various reduced-till techniques for many years: “I was toying with [going to continuous] no-till for several years, and then I attended the Winter Conference in Salina. The

Winter Conference was kind of a ‘motivational seminar’ that helped me to take the next step to continuous no-till.”

Olson began his no-till journey on his Russell County farm in 2001 by swearing off tillage for good. Having followed the local trend of under-cutting (v-blading) and the infamous ‘skip-a-till’ program, Olson played with no-till planting for a couple of years before returning from the No-till on the Plains Winter Conference with the nudge and resolve he needed to make the wholesale change. He purchased a 30-ft



Olson’s 2006 milo is looking strong.

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