

# Still More Opportunity

by Matt Hagny

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Central Oklahoma no-tiller Tony Kodesh claims not to be doing anything new, yet his operation has morphed considerably in five years. One big addition is corn. Tony first tried corn on 130 acres in '02, which he hired planted. That went well enough that he kept adding acres—to 2,500 in corn in '06, and 3,300 in '07 (including 500 acres of irrigation). He bought a 12-row planter in '04, but still hires half his corn planted—his friend Gerald Boyer has an identical 12-row, and they run both planters together to get Tony's corn planted. Kodesh's dryland corn formula is a seeding rate of 19,000 using 98- to 110-day hybrids, with all the N streamed on during late winter, and a low rate of liquid fertilizer through the planter Keetons.

The '06 drought knocked Tony's corn yields (yet he had some that made 40 bu/a on 0.6 inches of in-season rain), but Kodesh has seen enough good years that his enthusiasm for the crop hasn't waned. Plus, he points to the strong price and improved insurance for corn in his county. Kodesh likes corn because he can get it in earlier than milo, which he hasn't grown since '02 (and very little in '02 & '01). Kodesh also likes the simplicity of weed control in RR corn, that birds don't bother it as with milo, and the insect control is largely done with *Bt* (on 80% of his acres) and seed treatments. He hasn't had any problem with aflatoxin in the grain, either. Kodesh has even done well with 2d-year corn, which held up in the '06 drought, and he has many acres of it in '07. On his big switch to corn: "I just kinda roll along with whatever is

working," —but those who know Kodesh realize he puts some savvy thinking into those plans.

Meanwhile, Kodesh has cast aside cotton, and drastically reduced his full-season soybean program. "I have nothing against cotton," he says, "We did have one really good cotton crop a few years back." However, Kodesh likes to be on top of his harvesting, and hiring the cotton stripping wasn't satisfactory: "I guess I'm too particular about certain things," alluding that the job wasn't up to his expectations. Nor does owning cotton-harvesting equipment have much allure for Tony.

Kodesh explains the emphasis on corn while decreasing soybeans: "We needed corn to build up our residue levels, and to anchor it. I went

**A deluge of 10 inches of rain overnight on a field he just planted: "We didn't lose any soil."**

from not having a warm-season grass in my rotation to having too much." He grows good wheat following corn, so all-in-all, corn fits his system fairly well, although he is looking to return to more full-season soybeans in the niche between corn and wheat. Currently, his primary rotation is wht /dc soys >>corn >>corn, but that is overly simplified, since he still has quite a bit of alfalfa.

One reason Kodesh is heavy on corn this year is that his wheat plantings in the fall of '06 were curtailed by dry weather. And since it was too dry to double-crop last summer, this gave him the opportunity to do

more stacked wheat, which, he says, "Looks awesome." He further comments on how much better the no-till wheat in his area looks compared to the tilled fields: "The no-till held onto the scant moisture last fall." Kodesh even planted some wheat into live alfalfa late last fall, which proceeded to astonish him: "I don't know how it survived. But it's the most beautiful wheat I have right now."

In general though, Kodesh's intensive management of wheat has changed little: He uses Gaucho on all the seed, and the high rate where he predicts Hessian fly. Most of his wheat acres get fungicide at flag-leaf, depending on the year. One change he did make was going to 10-inch spacing when he traded his 1850 on an 1890 a couple years ago, and he's happy with the results: "There's less maintenance, and I have more weight per blade. I haven't seen any drop-off in yields . . . and no increase in weeds coming through the canopy."

Kodesh is pleased with advances in the condition of his no-till soils. A recent deluge dropped 10 inches of rain overnight on a field he had just planted to corn: "We didn't lose any soil," further explaining that he didn't move any residue with his row cleaners. He isn't sure the corn will make a stand in such soggy conditions, but breathes relief that at least his soil is intact—unlike some neighboring tilled fields. Kodesh keeps gaining rented land due to his care for the soil: "People are seeking us out because we're no-tilling." Healthy soils, healthy profits—Kodesh never stops his quest, commenting in his humble matter-of-fact style, "I just keep trying to improve." 🌿