

# Second Chances

by Matt Hagny

Most of us derive some satisfaction from watching crop seeds germinate, take hold as vigorous seedlings, and gain strength as they become established and flourishing plants. Similar development can occur when looking at the financial success of a well-run farm operation. Just as a seedling must make the best of the conditions in which it finds itself, so, too, will the farmer himself sometimes thrive by dint of a mixture of skill and good fortune.

Alan Aufdemberge is one producer who's had the skill to sail a prosperous course upon the winds of luck during the last decade. A bit of financial strife in the mid-'90s helped push Alan and his dad into no-till, which, along with other good decisions, has certainly rewarded their perseverance. Their farming operation in central Kansas, just south of Lincoln, reveals the care and thought these guys put into growing crops as well as a farming business.

Talk about a reversal of direction! Having attempted no-till milo in the early '80s, as well as watching some others struggle with no-till cropping, Alan didn't think very highly of the practice by the early '90s. "We didn't have the equipment back then. We got poor stands and we were discouraged." With some justification, he typically associated no-till with poor stands, poor weed control, and lower yields. That attitude is in shocking contrast to



today's Alan—a top-notch no-tiller and one who is not only comfortable with the practices involved but also as an outspoken proponent for the new mindset of no-till (he confesses to giving neighbors grief about burning their stubble and so forth).

## A Fresh Start

Some hiccups with cattle and crops in the early '90s had Alan and his dad choosing to sell nearly all of their machinery in the spring of '94 to get out from under some debt. They worked with two of Alan's cousins that year to put in their crop—all with tillage.

The following year ('95), Alan and his dad scraped

together some old machinery (including a neighbor's 6-row Allis planter from the early 1960s, which they rigged to apply fertilizer)

to plant the milo crop themselves using solely no-till. Alan says, "We ran that old planter day and night to get everything planted [that spring]." They also used the archaic planter to install double-crop milo after some of the wheat that year: "We beat our brains out running that planter!" Also in '95, they rented a JD 750 drill for one field of no-till soybeans that yielded 50 bu/a.

**"I've never missed a stand of alfalfa, and I don't burn the stubble."**

What made Alan think this gutsy no-till adventure would meet with success? He says simply, "It had to work, if we were going to stay in farming." They rented a Krause drill to plant some no-till wheat that fall ('95), although they v-bladed some other fields to put on anhydrous. "I'm still bouncing across those v-blade furrows," he says ruefully. By '96, they were 100% no-till on everything, having bought a JD 750 drill and an 8-row 7200 planter.



Photo by Vicki Meier.

Aufdemberge seeding wheat into killed alfalfa.