

Softer Footprints

We've previously discussed reducing soil compaction with tracks or large radial tires with proper inflation (see 'Pressure Relief' [Sept. '05] & 'Tread Lightly' [Jan. '08]). Producers are putting this in action, with favorable results.



Photo by Kent Stones.

Wheat harvest 2009 on the Kent Stones operation in north-central KS. Apparently Kent got quite serious about reducing soil compaction after a day spent digging and observing with one of his consultants in '08. Kent now runs the *big* tires on both of his *big* combines: "We went with the 650/85 R38 duals on the drives and 28L*26 on the steering. This is the lowest psi option that JD makes available."



Photo by Kevin Wiltse.

A couple years ago, Kevin Wiltse outfitted his new CIH 3320 sprayer (100-ft booms) with 650/65 R38 radial tires. He's pleased with the reduction in soil compaction in the wheel track, as well as the softer ride. Wiltse runs the recommended 18 – 20 psi in them, which is a fairly 'soft shoe' for a high-capacity sprayer (see table in 'Tread Lightly,' Jan. '08 issue).



Photo by Matt Hagny.

Most producers with wide tires on their sprayers have begun spraying cross-ways (perpendicular) to their 30-inch rows.

Stalks: Keep 'Em Standing

On several occasions, we've commented on the need to keep stalks standing, as tall and intact as possible, not only for durability of the mulch cover (a good thing) but also for ease of planting the next crop. Another hazard with pulverizing the stalk, etc., is the residue (and potentially the soil) blowing away—into fence-rows, hedgerows, road ditches, and elsewhere. These are lost resources.

One aspect of this is to do as *little* processing of corn stalks as possible when harvesting. Choose *fluted* snap rolls instead of knife rolls. And avoid heads that have separate cutting knives to shave the stalks off closer to the ground (Drago, Geringhoff); the stalk chopping is really a disaster for no-till with disc-opener seeders since you then have a mat of shredded residue to cut through. Choose heads and snap rolls that do the least amount of stalk breakage, and run the head just barely below the ears. (If you have trouble with the stalks pulling loose the tubes, wires, or hoses from your tractor, drill, or planter, consider adding a heavy knock-down bar or pipe across the front.) 🌿



Photo by Kent Stones.

During corn harvest in '09, Kent Stones was running different corn head models on his two combines in alternating swaths: A new JD 608, and an older JD 893—both with knife rolls. "The new head has a geometry forcing a lower cut on the stalks. I remember thinking at the time, 'I'm not so sure I like this.'" After planting 2d-year corn into those stalks and catching a 60-mph wind, he was *sure* he didn't like it—most of the residue tumbled away. In the photo, the shorter, paler corn plants are rows harvested with the 893, where the residue piled up 3 – 4 inches deep after blowing off the shorter, more pulverized stalks from the 608 head (note the bare soil). To alleviate the problem, Stones went to fluted snap rolls (instead of knife rolls) and will tilt the feeder house frame to allow a flatter operating angle.