



NORTH PLATTE
Natural Resources District

Press Release

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No Till Notes

Date: For the week of Oct. 19, 2008

No Till Notes: Sugar Beets I

By Mark Watson, Panhandle No Till Educator

Sugar beets have been an important cash crop for the Panhandle of Nebraska for many years. If water allocations were drastically lowered, would producers still be able to raise high yielding and profitable sugar beet crops? I believe we could and I think no till farming practices would aid in this effort to raise profitable sugar beet crops with less water.

Sugar beets have a deep tap root which would make me think they would adapt well to limited irrigation since they could go deep into the soil profile to access soil moisture. Researchers have determined sugar beets are one of the more water efficient crops. Sugar beets were grown dry land at the High Plains research farm near Sidney this year and early indications are they will yield pretty good. With proper soil and residue management I think sugar beets could produce a high yielding crop with considerably less water than producers have used in the past. The sugar beet industry has also adopted Roundup Ready technology for weed control in sugar beets. Weeds would be relatively easy to control in no till sugar beets provided we don't develop glyphosphate resistant weeds in the near future.

So what are the challenges to no till farming practices with sugar beet production? One challenge would be establishing the crop in heavy residue. As

with any crop planted into no till crop production, there is always a challenge of managing the high amount of residue in planting the crop. I think with proper planter adjustments and adaptations, establishing the crop in high residue would be relatively easy. We faced the same challenges with corn and edible beans and have made improvements to our planters which have given us good stands of these crops. One of the biggest improvements we made to our planters was to have enough weight on the planter frame that the down pressure springs could work properly. Once the sugar beet crop is established, the high amounts of residue would prove beneficial in crop development.

Another challenge would be soil compaction. Proper crop rotation would help solve compaction problems. Moderate compaction problems can be solved over time with freezing and thawing and root development through the compaction layers.

Next week I'll continue with this concept of growing sugar beets in no till. But I'd like to mention the upcoming Winter No Till Conference that is coming up at the Gering Civic Center on November 18-19. This conference will be an excellent opportunity for producers to learn and see first-hand how no till is done. Conference speakers will include Dwayne Beck, Paul Jasa, Ray Ward, Bruce Bosley, Will Eitzman, Steve Melvin, Randy Anderson, and Al Dutcher, along with a panel of producers who are making no till work on their place. There will also be an evening social where you can mingle and visit one on one with any of these experts. Cost for two full days of no till know-how, manuals, literature, and meals is \$75. Conference sponsorships are also still available. Consider it an investment in your operation or your business. You can see a full agenda and get registered now at <http://www.panhandlercd.org/notill.htm>.