

Conservation Agriculture Systems Alliance

Conference Call

Tuesday, Jan 5 at 11 a.m. (eastern)

Participants:

Susan Winsor, Corn and Soybean Digest,
Jerry Hatfield, National Soil Tilth Laboratory
Jerry LeMunyon, NRCS
Bill Kuenstler, NRCS
Russ Evans, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association
Joel Myers, PANTA
Larry Wright, SPARC
Sjoerd Duiker, PANTA
Randall Reeder, Ohio No-Till Council
Blair McClinton, Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Assn
Norm Widman, NRCS
Karen Scanlon, CTIC

AGENDA

Continuing discussion on CA certification/standard for U.S.

Randall Reeder contacted Norm Widman, national agronomist for NRCS, and acquired information about no-till standard. He said: We do not necessarily worry so much whether something is no till, but rather the management that is needed to address the site specific needs. There are many cases where manure needed to be incorporated to address an odor problem or runoff problem. Then it may be better to use mulch till than no till. We try to be site specific - do what is needed to address the producer's concerns on a field by field basis.

In no-till standard 329, "No full-width tillage shall be performed regardless of the depth of the tillage operation." Mulch-till does allow full-width tillage.

NW: should be safe in defining what no-till and mulch-till is in each state.

Strip till does count as no-till

Aerway and phoenix harrow do not count as no-till

Does para-till (subsoil that does not invert soil) count as no-till? NW: as long as not 100% soil disturbance and the STIR factor less than 30.

STIR is formula that looks at amount of disturbance a tool does to the soil (surface and at depth).

If injecting manure, must use very fine knife to qualify as no-till.

If ends up looking like strip-till, could qualify.

Anhydrous application does qualify under no-till

Manure that does no more disturbance than an anhydrous knife would qualify as no-till.

All the operations in a crop yield must not disturb to STIR factor greater than 30

SD: what would appeal to consumer about a CA certification?

LW: the ecosystem services that are inherent in a CA system. We need to be in the game to name those services. We use technology and sustainable practices, provide environmental benefits (air, water, soil, wildlife habitat)

SD: have to recognize that the standards that will be scrutinized.

LW: talked about the integrity needed and third-party certification system. USDA will be looking at a standard for sustainability in agriculture.

RR: terms no-till and mulch till will not sell anything. CA, ecofarming, etc will sell better, something that conveys the environmental benefits and compete with organic.

NW: been working with specialty crops association, which is developing a stewardship index. Series of questions and data that a producer fills out. Not a standard. For example, farmers are rated in a geographic area on how using N fertilizer to get a ranking on the stewardship index.

JH: think about what value is added to the label – quality of food, ecosystem services (water quality, runoff, wildlife) that has to be pushed a different way to get people to understand the value of a different system. Explained so that consumers see the value.

KS: don't want to position this to compete with organic, but rather get in niche of ecosystem services and many environmental benefits

Jerry M: talked about CASA involvement in Mexico in 2010

KS: NRCS, do we have support to pursue this?

BK: probably not a high priority for the agency.

NW: certification for no-till wouldn't be priority. Overall stewardship score may be of interest. Wouldn't do anything for the agency, but more for marketing of food/products.

BK: would lend support, but stay out of it.

RE: if a certification process differentiates a market advantage for these practices, wouldn't this be aligned with NRCS goal of getting these practices adopted

RR: trying to get certified through govt agency took years for organic. Suppose we call it Certified Conservation Farming, have silver standard (mulch till) and gold standard (no-till).

RE: not suggesting govt agency certification, but do think it's in agency's best interest to support CASA and regional organizations to develop this standard. Only way it works is if consumers know about it and it takes dollars to develop.

SD: a lot of what we produce is feed for animals, not something consumers buy. Easier to put label on wheat, which is closer to consumers.

RR: like organic beef, poultry

SD: like beef or milk produced with CA principles?

RR: right.

BM: one way to move this along is....right now carbon trading creates a form of certification. No-till is one main practice to sequester carbon. So is an example of what we're talking about. Real question is can we get additional value on top of this standard, which is already underway (certified for carbon trading). Third-party verification in place through carbon trading

certification. If US government does implement climate legislation and there is trading for farmers, then the value of CCX will grow. Can we build on that instead of reinventing the wheel?

Jerry H: no update on carbon trading. Working on GHG emissions from livestock, crops and forestry in preparation for adjusting to legislation comes out of process. In reality, until there is legislation comes out, carbon markets are just waiting. Don't see any movement until late 2010. Congress has enough with health care. Still work going on for standards and certification. Those will roll out mid year. USDA is developing.

SW: can recall studying standards in college in the '70s....are we revisiting something started decades ago?

BK: have broadened perspective to look at conservation agriculture, e.g. to look at more than just soil loss to entire soil quality.

SW: if this were to really go anywhere, would make it a prerequisite for farm program payments.

BK: was basis for 1985 conservation compliance Farm Bill. We still have requirements for conservation plan for eligibility for program benefits. However in some places, acceptable levels for eligibility are not consistent (2 times T).

What's next?

BM: ultimately farmers have to want to do this. Need to get feedback from grower organizations as to what direction to go and how much effort to put into this. Planning to survey our members and will plan to ask them if this is area of interest.

SW: farmers feel that they already are doing these good things and keep government out of it. Don't see official designation as something that helps them.

RR: has to be a market oriented thing – creates market advantage.

SD: like to learn more about what is happening in South America

BK: will attend NTOP meeting; will talk with folks from Brazil about certification process

BM: Ivo Mello is coming to his conference and Blair will talk with him

Joel: Randall and Joel will talk with more folks at national no-till conference

Member Updates

SSCA: annual conference in Feb 9-10, original speaker was Roberto Pierretti, he backed out, so Ivo Mello will speak; scaling back operations (all staff will be part-time as of March 1); developing proposal to establish center for CA, working with Univ of Saskatchewan

PNDSA: Annual conference is Jan 20-21 in Kennewick, Wash., good support from sponsorship; lots of interest; may see significant amount of acres be removed from plow. Nila wanting to know opinion of FAO position at Copenhagen talks (she disappointed on lack of push for CA). Email exchange developed and interest grew in establishing global discussion between SA, European and NA groups.

PANTA: 15 meetings planned for Jan and Feb; Feb. 16-17 meeting for crop professionals. Sjoerd planning to go to DC.

Ohio No-Till Council: ASABE cover story on no-till (co-written by Reeder); CT Conference Feb 25-26, 2010, in Ada, Ohio, being promoted now; Tri-State No-till conference is late January; National No-till conference

SPARC: Third statewide no-till conference on Feb. 8-9 in Norman, Oklahoma.

NRCS: Juan Manuel invited CASA to Mexico to see conservation tillage there. Would like to host meeting.

Susan Winsor: Feb issue has conservation theme; profiling Mark Bower who invented soil warrior

CTIC: Farmer network meeting to discuss cover crops scheduled for Feb. 16 in Indiana. Next week, Karen will participate in meeting with FAO, World Bank, USDA and others on Jan. 15.

Next call:

Thursday, Feb. 11, 2010 at 11 am (eastern)