

# OPTIONS FOR A FIRST YEAR NO-TILL & COVER CROPPING SYSTEM

August 2018

## Decisions for Success

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Are you interested in no-till corn this year? No-tilling into sod is a great way to get into a no-till/cover crop system. The following chart is composed of management guidelines that we think will give farmers the greatest chance of success based on what we have seen in the field. This sheet is meant to act as a guideline and is not comprehensive. The system that you choose will vary by farm and change depending on real-time circumstances. Manure and fertilizer applications should be planned and implemented as part of a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). Contact your local Extension office for more information and guidance on how to change over to this new cropping system.

|                                  |   |           |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| <b>No-Till Corn<br/>Into Sod</b> | Remove first cut of hay at the end of May.  | THEN / OR |
|                                  | No-till plant "short season" corn into living sod as soon as the soil moisture permits.*  |           |
|                                  | Apply an additional 30 lb/ac N to compensate for lack of early N mineralization from tillage.   |           |
|                                  | Spray herbicide 7-10 days after harvesting first cut hay, or at time of planting if not harvesting hay.   |           |
| <b>Apply Cover<br/>Crop</b>      | Broadcast 25 lb/ac annual ryegrass with sidedress fertilizer if no residual herbicide used.   | OR        |
|                                  | Broadcast 112 lb/ac winter cereal rye with helicopter or Highboy in August, if adequate soil moisture.  | OR        |
|                                  | Broadcast AND incorporate, or preferably drill 75 lb/ac winter cereal rye as soon as possible after corn harvest, ideally by mid-September.                                 |           |
| <b>Spread<br/>Manure</b>         | Inject or incorporate liquid manure with injector shanks, disk, or aerway then surface apply, after corn harvest in mid September but before planting cover crop.           | OR        |
|                                  | Surface apply manure (lower rate of 3,000-7,000 gallons/ac to not smoother cover crop) either within one week of planting cover crop, or after cover crop is 4 inches tall. |           |

\*The knee test is helpful to determine if a soil is dry enough to plant no-till. When on your knees, if they get wet, the land is probably too wet and you risk sidewall compaction and poor germination.

# First year planning chart

The following sheet is meant to help you visualize your cropping plan through the growing season.

| Month                             | May | June | July | August | September |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------|------|--------|-----------|
| Planting                          |     |      |      |        |           |
| Harvest, Weed Control, or Tillage |     |      |      |        |           |
| Manure/Fertilizer                 |     |      |      |        |           |

The system that you choose will ultimately be as unique as the farm itself. Also remember to include a “plan B”. For example, if you plan to plant your annual crop in early May and use herbicides to kill the sod, what will you do if the soil is too wet and you cannot plant until the end of May? Will you harvest the hay crop before planting? By planning for different scenarios, you will be more likely to find success during implementation. Remember that no-till usually works best in combination with cover crops in the long term. If you are new to the no-till system, start out small and expand gradually. Give us a call if you have more questions or would like us to help you develop your plan for success!



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