

Conservation Agriculture Systems Alliance

Conference Call

Tuesday, Oct 6 at 11 a.m. (eastern)

Participants:

Brian Lindley, No-Till on the Plains

Blair McClinton, Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association

Russ Evans, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association

Tim Healey, Agrotain

Bill Kuenstler, NRCS

Leonard Binstock, ADMC

Susan Winsor, Corn & Soybean Digest

Karen Scanlon, CTIC

AGENDA

Susan Winsor: What motivates farmers to implement conservation systems: drainage, no-till, other. Are they altruistic? Does it differ between land owners and renters.

Leonard Binstock: shortage of technical people to get practices on the ground. Need to figure out better system to deliver technical services. Limited time window for getting changes made; often

Bill Kuenstler: herbicide-resistant weeds in cotton-soybean-wheat region; may keep growers from implementing no-till; ties into emphasis on continuous cover

Discussion of drainage water management in conservation agriculture.

Leonard Binstock, executive director of ADMC,

<http://www.admcoalition.org/dwmbooklethtml.html>

I. Do you think DWM would be appealing to farmers in your area/organization?

Russ – limited use. Some subsurface drainage in higher rainfall regions. Pretty minimal, but one concern expressed is interim drainage ditches requiring setback for farmers to be in compliance with CSP. No-till eliminates the need for ditches.

SW: can we document N leaching reduction?

LB: through demonstration found that reduction in outflow correlates to reduction in nitrate levels. Outside the corn belt, the need for drainage changes. Predominant in corn belt (8 states) where drainage needed to avoid compaction and provide good seed bed. Above 24" of rainfall will be in need of drainage.

BM: in relatively dry area, big issue for us in surface drainage. Issues around improving field efficiencies and surface water drainage. Ducks Unlimited study on importance of wetlands in reducing P loading in Lake Winnepeg drainage area.

BK: fair interest in Illinois (Richard Cook at Univ of Illinois works with bioreactors); this is a budding technology, but adoption not very widespread. Still learning best way to

manage water table, how high can we bring it, overcome fears of producers that water won't be out in time to plant in spring. Needs more exposure to producers.

BL: if Midwestern intensified crop rotations, then could use excess water

2. What benefits of DWM -- which can range from reducing nutrient flow off the farm to the possibility of yield increases -- would be most compelling to growers in your area/group? How much of an improvement -- in water quality, yield or other measures -- would make DWM appealing?

BK: by reducing outflow, reducing N loss from fields; by keeping water and nitrates in soil so crop can use it; create oxygen deficit zone; additional water in root zone if can manage so we learn techniques water table up (but not too high) (South and North Carolina have done a lot of sub-irrigation). NRCS just announced \$320mil Mississippi River Basin initiative. DWM is listed as a practice that can help reduce nutrient losses in basin.

LB: many states using EQIP cost share to get DWM on the ground. DWM is approved for CSP.

LB: biggest benefit being analyzed with project is yield increase. Purdue showing 2-4% increase on corn. Hoping to see significant increase in yield across corn belt.

3. Where do you think growers are going to turn for more information on DWM?

LB: ADMC, Extension bulletins, NRCS practice standards

4. Does DWM fit in with any of the environmental/conservation initiatives your group is pursuing?

RE: it's a tool that some will apply in conjunction with other practices; not a first line of defense, but part of a system

BK: nutrient runoff is bigger problem than losses thru drainage water; so DWM is part of the system that looks to reduce losses from all sources

SW: diffusion of information among farmers? How does new information spread among farmers?

LB: recently at MN Dept of Ag who will be looking at those questions. Had a meeting with focus group to determine who to invite to ultimate focus group to discuss. Will break into different areas: producers/owners, agencies (extension, conservation districts, etc), etc.

RE: who are the ones that everyone is watching? PNDSA gives direct seeders opportunity to share information outside of coffee shop. Breakfast meetings require

participation (presentation about conservation on their farm); hold 6 meetings a year, so everyone has to present at least one. Supplement with additional information on a priority topic. One group (20-40 people) going for 10 years, plus new groups added each year. Information gets out in pockets – some adopt and information spreads within group.

BL: many farmers read about new information in newsletters, magazines (Corn and Soybean Digest, Farm Journal, Successful Farming). According to our surveys, information on no-till is obtained from NTOP, news/magazines, web site, (last is always extension)

BM: documented that there is usually a pattern of a successful early adopter is watched by neighbors. Survey information parallels what Brian said. Most farmers don't get information from extension or government field offices. Extension does play critical role in getting first innovator to adopt a new practices. Focused on training crop advisors and crop consultants on no-till management.

BL: Dwayne Beck helps to nurture an innovator, and gives special attention so that person succeeds. Those people "pass it forward" to their community. Invite groups out to their farms and tell them about their operation and conservation system. Growing area is online discussion sites.

LB: early indicators in technology go to extension to get confirmation or once decided to go that route; don't go to them for guidance. Go to producer organizations for guidance. Area newsletters/newspapers cover new topics that capture producer attention.

Member Updates

No-till On the Plains: Conference coming up. Check out web site. Agriculture Air Quality Task Force meeting recently attended. NRCS promoting cover crops. Obstacle is rule that says cover crop is second crop and restriction on harvesting fruit/vegetable (?).

SSCA: Conference Feb 9-10 in Regina and crop advisors workshop will be Dec 3-4 in Saskatoon (also available via live webinar). Transitioning as an organization to address budget deficit (could affect Blair's involvement). Also working on proposal to establish Center for CA for Canadian prairies. Looking for funding through Canadian government.

PNDSA: Annual conference is Jan 20-21 in Kennewick, Wash. Breakfast meetings are ongoing. Dealing with big issue of CRP take-out. Identified that penalty dates and final dates don't bode well for direct seed cropping system. Working with FSA and NRCS to develop proposal for modifying dates without penalizing growers. Proposing pilot project for under 14" and over 14" rainfall regions; get early access to spray (half of CRP, which is then seeded) without penalty. Remaining half stays in CRP for extra year. Requirement to direct seed.

NRCS: Been to SWCS conferences (Michigan in July and Kansas City in Sept) with CASA poster.

Agrotain: appreciate the discussion and the time everyone puts into the calls

ADMC: Oct. 12-14 in Minneapolis with ADMS/ADMC annual meeting with NRCS, EPA, land grant colleges, association. Review issues specific to drainage and water quality and quantity. Also will discuss final report on CIG (2006) to demonstrate DWM. Also working on bioreactors, saturated buffers to benefit water quality and quantity. Next initiative is to take to producers (information) and influence them to adopt practices.