

Chemical Tillage

By HAROLD KERR

Chemical tillage is attracting considerable attention from dryland wheat growers in the Columbia Basin.

The program allows for a reduction in the amount of tillage which occurs by replacing two or more operations with an application of a chemical to reduce weeds and volunteer wheat growth in the stubble.

The advantages of the practice are somewhat obvious. They include less fuel consumption, less wear and tear on equipment, and less erosion if the practices used result in more straw or crop residue left on the surface. Yet to be entirely proved is that there is more water stored, thereby increasing yield.

The disadvantages are a higher cash cost and, perhaps, more problems with conventional seeders plugging due to increased crop residue.

Recent Oregon State University cost studies indicate slightly higher costs for the chemical tillage concept, which can be easily offset with yield increases of one bushel or more.

Growers are trying the new practice on a trial basis in most cases. The ASCS office in Morrow County will cost

share on 50 acres for a maximum of \$6 per acre. This allows the grower to try this new concept on a limited acreage and decide how it will work for him under his particular conditions.

Growers have a rather wide variety of chemicals available to use in this practice. They can choose a fall-applied herbicide such as Atrazine and Bladex, Chem Hoe 135, or Metribuzin (Sencor or Lexone). These products stop growth of the weeds and volunteer wheat or kill the unwanted plants before they extract moisture from the soil.

Spring-applied herbicides, such as Roundup and Paraquat, kills the growth on contact without leaving any residue in the soil.

Each of these products has a place and combinations of chemicals may prove to be the best way to go.

Don Rydrych, OSU weed researcher, has been working with these various products for a number of years and is the best source of information on how successful this concept has been.

If yields can be maintained or slightly increased, the chemical tillage concept has enough advantages that many growers will be willing to adopt this new practice, especially as fuel and equipment costs increase at what appears to be a disproportionate rate to other costs.

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State Soil and Water Commission merges with State Agriculture Dept.

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts passed a resolution at its recent annual meeting supporting the merger of the State Soil & Water Conservation Commission with the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

The governor and some legislators proposed the merger based on strengthening the commission and districts and as a tax dollar savings' measure. It is believed the Oregon Department of Agriculture offers a number of advantages, including a strengthened administrative capability and a strong political base.

Although a majority of districts supported the resolution there was some feeling of the commission and districts being put in a position of not being able to say "no" without perhaps losing the existing financial support to districts.

Important conditions in the resolution are:

1. Commission to remain appointed by the governor and to remain a policy setting body.
2. A member of the commission to serve on the Board of Agriculture with voting powers.
3. Commission members to be SWCD directors at time of appointment.
4. Commission and staff to be a separate division with the Department of Agriculture and current staff position to be retained.

The OACD Executive Committee will now work with the commission, Department of Agriculture, the governor's office and legislators to implement the merger with these conditions.

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