

No Till November

LINCOLN - During a special month-long campaign called “No Till November”, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging Nebraska farmers to “keep the stubble” on their harvested crop fields and improve soil health.

The project is mirrored after the national cancer awareness “No Shave November” campaign. The “No Till November” campaign encourages farmers to keep a different kind of stubble by parking tillage equipment in their machine sheds this fall and keep crop stubble on their fields.

“No till farming is a cornerstone soil health practice, which also promotes water quality while saving farmers time and money,” said Acting State Conservationist Myron Taylor. “One of the first soil health principles is ‘do not disturb.’ This campaign is a fun way to remind farmers about the important relationship between tillage and soil health.”

Improving soil health increases soil biological activity, which provides erosion control, nutrient benefits and can simulate tillage.

Nebraska State Conservation Agronomist Corey Brubaker says fall tillage disturbs soil and removes valuable cover that can leave soil exposed and unprotected during harsh winter months. Other field-disturbing practices like baling corn stalks also removes valuable cover and nutrients from the field.

“Farmers who bale cornstalks for livestock bedding or sell it to other livestock producers could be entering into a losing proposition due to the lost nutrient value and soil health benefits,” Brubaker said.

Based on current commodity prices and the nutrient value in each bale, Brubaker says farmers should leave crop residue in the field especially if the fields are highly erodible and subject to conservation compliance.

“The plant residue left in the field after harvest is a valuable resource,” says Brubaker. “The value in cornstalks can be better used for reducing soil erosion, providing extra organic matter content in the soil, and contributing nutrients back to the soil.”

In Nebraska, cornstalk bales are currently selling for \$45-75 per ton. The estimated cost of baling cornstalks, considering the value of the nutrients removed (\$28/ton*), custom raking (\$3/ton), and custom baling (\$22/ton), is about \$53 per ton. If bales are sold at the lower end of the current rate, farmers are not

only losing money, but also the benefits of leaving residue on their fields.

Conservationists at the Natural Resources Conservation Service say the best thing producers can do for their cropland is to leave it undisturbed as much as possible. They encourage producers this November to not till their fields and keep crop residue in place to replenish the soil.

For more information on how to protect and improve soil quality, contact your local NRCS office or to www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

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