

Long Term No-Till

Definition/Purpose

A Long-Term No-Till Practice means planting all crops for five consecutive years with at least eighty percent (80%) of the at-plant soil surface covered by plant residue from preceding crops to improve water quality. Benefits may include reduced soil erosion, sedimentation and pollution from dissolved and sediment-attached substances.

Policies

1. Long term no-till may be applied on any cropland where adequate ground cover is maintained. Soil fertility levels should be high before establishing a long term no-till system. This applies to crop rotations that include fallow periods as well as annual planting. When fallow periods are included, no surface soil disturbance is allowed.
2. A heavy residue must be maintained throughout the crop rotation, with 80% residue required at planting for all crops. This requirement may prohibit practices such as haying and grazing. If required, cover crops must be established at plant populations that will provide adequate residue for no-till planting (see standard for Cover Crop 340). A minimum of 80% ground cover is required at planting. Soil disturbance during the harvest of crops must be held to a minimum.
3. Payments for Long Term No-Till systems shall be limited to \$150 per acre. No payment for this incentive shall be made until required 80% residue is certified by a field office representative. Any cooperators who receive state or federal funds for annual or 3-year conservation tillage incentives after September 20, 2000 may remain eligible to receive incentive payments for long-term no-till. The incentive payment will be reduced to \$90 per acre on land that has been in the 3-year conservation tillage practice and the previous incentive is counted toward the lifetime cap for long-term no-till (see #11 below).
4. Cooperators who have received state or federal cost share for annual conservation tillage prior to September 20, 2000 remain eligible for this incentive.
5. To be eligible for the 3-year Conservation Tillage (Grain and Cotton) or the Long –Term No-Till incentive, the cooperator must certify that they are not already practicing long-term no-till and maintaining the required percent cover on any land that they farm. Cooperators may receive cost share payments for long-term no-till for additional land for subsequent years, as long as they have not adopted long-term no-till. Adopting long-term no-till requires achieving 80% at-plant residue for five years.
6. Fields should not have severe infestations of weeds that are difficult to control.
7. The earliest allowable herbicide burn down for legumes will be early bloom. The earliest allowable herbicide burn down for grasses will be early boot.
8. All cover crops must be allowed to reach a reasonable level of maturity before herbicide burn down, prior to planting. Suggested planting rates and planting dates can be found in the NRCS Technical Guide, Standard 340, Cover Crop.

Agriculture Cost Share Program

9. Integrated pest management will be encouraged.
10. The five-year period for long-term no-till begins with the first crop at planting time and ends with the last crop at harvest.
11. Each cooperator will be limited to a \$25,000.00 combined lifetime cap for long-term no-till and 3-year conservation tillage. If the cooperator has previously received incentive payments for 3-year conservation tillage for grain and cotton, then the amount of the incentive the cooperator may receive for long-term no-till is reduced by the amount of the incentive previously received.
12. No burning of residue is allowed.
13. BMP soil, nitrogen, and phosphorus impacts are required on the contract. Include the planted acreage as well. Refer to the Minimum NCACSP Effects Requirements table later in this section for the correct methods of calculation.
14. When determining the acreage for which payments can be made for this practice, only the acreage actually planted shall be considered. The area occupied by farm roads, best management practices, ditches, structures, etc. shall not be included in planted acreage.
15. Minimum life of BMP is five (5) years.
16. On occasion it may be unavoidable for the cooperator to need to access the field when the traffic will result in ruts in the field (e.g., harvest operations). With documented approval from field staff, the cooperator can spot disk/level ruts to smooth out the surface. The field staff will work with the cooperator to stay in compliance with his/her conservation tillage contract. If field staff determines adequate cover can be established prior to next crop being planted, a cover crop should be planted immediately. The field staff can provide a recommendation on what might be best to plant as a quick cover. Cooperators must contact their district office for assistance.
 - a. Field staff needs to determine the level of need for isolated disking. If smoothing the ruts will allow for the cooperator to stay in compliance, no contract extension will be required.
 - b. If extensive disking and leveling occurs, contract must be extended by one year or cooperator must refund entire amount of incentive payment.

Standards

NC NRCS Technical Guide, Section IV, Standard # 328 (Conservation Crop Rotation), #329A (Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till and Strip Till), #340 (Cover Crop), #778 (Long Term No-Till)

(Policy #16 added March 2010)