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Conservation Tillage: Benefiting Farmers, Society, and the Environment

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Foreword

Less than 100 years as a state, Oklahoma still retains much frontier flavor. People are friendly always with a quick greeting, a kind word, and little pretense. Agriculture and petroleum remain vital industries, though in recent years there are many manufacturing and service industries that are adding to the state's economic diversity.

Not only is Oklahoma's economy diverse, the geography and climate are also. In sections of Southeastern Oklahoma, annual rainfall exceeds 50 inches. Forests similar to those in the plains of the Gulf States abound and forest products are an important part of the economy. In moving from east to west, for every 15 miles there is one less inch of rain per year. At the western end of the Panhandle adjacent to New Mexico, annual precipitation is approximately 14 inches. In the eastern part of the state, elevations are as low as 500 feet above sea level. In the High Plains at the western end of the Panhandle elevations exceed 4000 feet.

Each year there are parts of Oklahoma, if not the entire state that have extended periods of no precipitation. Undoubtedly, you have heard of the Dust Bowl era in the late 1930's. During a prolonged drought and because there was little ground cover, winds picked up large quantities of soil and dust and created a cloud that many reported virtually blocked the sun. However, as you travel in the state you will see flood control structures - when precipitation does occur, rates can be very high. These conditions - both lack of rain and excessive rain - present great challenges to agricultural producers and to the organizations and institutions that assist them.

Through much research and education, Oklahoma State University (OSU) has provided technology and information that has helped agriculturists to adopt systems that lead to enhanced productivity utilizing scarce moisture, yet able to maintain soils when heavy rains occur. Conservation tillage has been a vital part of these strategies. Occurrences such as the Dust Bowl and large amounts of soil being eroded into streams and rivers are virtually nonexistent. However, we continuously seek ever better procedures and practices.

Many of the techniques of conservation tillage have also helped lead to overall improved natural resource management. In addition to better crop and livestock productivity, there are enhanced practices that are aimed at concurrently improving wildlife habitat. These practices are helping to provide economic diversity in rural communities as fee based hunting, bird watching, and other activities become more prevalent.

OSU has worked with many partners including Federal and state agencies, agricultural and conservation organizations, and numerous individuals. Additionally, we have worked with many of you. Sharing of information and technology, even before it is published, is a great tradition in the Land Grant and agricultural communities.

The Southern Conservation Tillage Conference is an important forum for learning and for establishing new professional connections. Oklahoma and Oklahoma State are excited that you have chosen to be with us in 2001. You and we, all of us, and those whom we serve, will benefit greatly from sharing our knowledge and know how.

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