



**Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**  
**RESIDUE AND TILLAGE MANAGEMENT, NO-TILL**

**CODE 329**

**(ac)**

**DEFINITION**

Limiting soil disturbance to manage the amount, orientation and distribution of crop and plant residue on the soil surface year around.

**PURPOSE**

This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes–

- Reduce sheet, rill and wind erosion and excessive sediment in surface waters.
- Reduce tillage-induced particulate emissions.
- Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content.
- Increase plant-available moisture.
- Reduce energy use.
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to all cropland.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Residue shall not be burned.

Distribute all residues uniformly over the entire field. Removing residue from directly within the seeding or transplanting area prior to or as part of the planting operation is acceptable.

This practice only involves an in-row soil disturbance operation during strip tillage, the planting operation, and a seed row/furrow closing device. There is no full-width soil disturbance performed from the time immediately following harvest or termination of one cash crop through harvest or termination of the next cash crop in the rotation regardless of the depth of the tillage operation. The soil tillage intensity rating (STIR) value shall include all field operations that are performed during the crop interval between harvest and termination of the previous cash crop and harvest or termination of the current cash crop (includes fallow periods). The crop interval STIR value shall be no greater than 20.

**Additional Criteria to Reduce Sheet, Rill and Wind Erosion, Reduce Excessive Sediment in Surface Waters, and Reduce Tillage-Induced Particulate Emissions**

Use the current approved water and wind erosion prediction technology to determine the if field operations planned provide the amount of randomly distributed surface residue needed, time of year residue needs to be present in the field, and amount of surface soil disturbance allowed to reduce erosion to the desired level. Calculations shall account for the effects of other practices in the management system.

NRCS reviews and periodically updates conservation practice standards. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service State office or visit the Field Office Technical Guide online by going to the NRCS website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/> and type FOTG in the search field.

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**Additional Criteria to Maintain or Increase Soil Health and Organic Matter Content**

Ensure the soil condition index (SCI) for the cropping system results in a positive rating.

When residue is removed for Bio Fuel, consider using the Ohio State University Extension Soil Organic Matter Calculator and field data (%SOM based on recent soil test data & Historical Yield Monitor data) for the critical or dominate soil and slope. The SOM calculator is available free to MI Corn Growers or upon written request to OSUE at the South Center Campus Website at Piketon, OH. The SOM calculator and accurate yield monitor data can help a grower more accurately predict soil loss and the economics of corn residue harvested for biofuel on SOM changes.

**Additional Criteria to Increase Plant-Available Moisture**

Maintain a minimum of 60 percent residue cover on the soil surface throughout the year.

**Trapping Snow**

Minimum crop stubble height during the time significant snowfall is expected to occur shall be—

- At least 10 inches for crops with a row spacing of less than 15 inches.
- At least 15 inches for crops with a row spacing of 15 inches or greater.

**Additional Criteria to Reduce Energy Use**

Reduce the total energy consumption associated with field operations by at least 25 percent compared to the benchmark condition. Use the current approved NRCS tool for determining energy use to document energy use reductions. See the current Fuel Use Templates in RUSLE 2, WEPS or IET.

**Additional Criteria to Provide Food and Escape Cover for Wildlife**

Use an approved habitat evaluation procedure to determine when residue needs to be present, and the amount, orientation, and stubble height needed to provide adequate food and cover for target species.

**CONSIDERATIONS****General Considerations**

Removal of crop residue, such as by baling or grazing, can have a negative impact on resources. These activities should not be performed without full evaluation of impacts on soil, water, animal, plant, and air resources.

Production of adequate crop residues to achieve the purpose(s) of this practice can be enhanced through the use of high residue crops and crop varieties, use of cover crops, double cropping, and adjustment of plant populations through seeding rates and row spacing.

When providing technical assistance to organic producers, ensure residue and tillage management, activities are consistent with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service National Organic Program regulations.

Residue should not be shredded after harvest. Shredding residue makes it more susceptible to movement by wind or water, and areas where residue accumulates may interfere with planting the next crop.

Using residue management - no till for all crops in the rotation or cropping system can enhance the positive effects of this practice by—

- Increasing the rate of soil organic matter accumulation.
- Keeping soil in a consolidated condition and improved stability.
- Sequestering additional carbon in the soil.
- Further reducing the amount of particulate matter generated by field operations.
- Reduce energy inputs to establish crops.

- Forming root channels and other near-surface voids that increase infiltration.

### **Considerations to Increase Soil Health and Organic Matter Content**

Carbon loss is directly related to the volume of soil disturbed, intensity of the disturbance and soil moisture content and soil temperature at the time the disturbance occurs. To make this practice more effective—

- When deep soil disturbance is performed, such as by subsoiling or fertilizer injection, make sure the vertical slot created by these implements is closed at the surface.
- Planting with a single disk or slot opener no-till drill will release less CO<sub>2</sub> and oxidize less organic matter than planting with a wide-point hoe/chisel opener seeder drill.
- Soil disturbance that occurs when soil temperatures are below 50° F will oxidize less organic matter and release less CO<sub>2</sub> than operations done when the soil is warmer.
- Maximizing year-round coverage of the soil with living vegetation (e.g., cover crops) and/or crop residues builds organic matter and reduces soil temperature, thereby slowing organic matter oxidation.
- Use a diverse crop rotation, incorporating multiple crop types (cool-season grass, cool-season legume/forb, warm-season grass, warm-season legume/forb) into the crop rotation.
- Plant a cover crop after every cash crop in the rotation. Multispecies cover crop mixes provide greater benefits than single-specie cover crops.
- Achieve high yields so SOM gains exceed SOM losses. The Ohio State University Extension-Soil Organic Matter (OSUE SOM) Calculator can evaluate the impact of no-till and other management practices on the current SOM level based on a soil test.
- Consider using the current SOM level and yield monitor data from the critical slope to more accurately predict the water erosion rate. Use the OSUE SOM Calculator with this Big farm data to evaluate if SOM gains are exceeding SOM losses. This calculation is more accurate of SOM trend and erosion prediction on critical slopes than an SCI calculation using average yield for the dominate slope in the field.
- The OSUE-SOM Calculator assumes that no tillage is only effective if applied continuously for many years. If a field is moldboard plowed once in three to five years all SOM changes will be lost. This is transitional no-till, not true no-till.
- No-till will help improve crop yields and hence SOM only if the drainage and fertilization are adequate. This effect also depends on the cropping system and the starting SOM level.

### **Considerations to Increase Plant-Available Moisture**

Leaving stubble taller than the 10-inch minimum will trap more snow.

Variable-height stubble patterns may be created to further increase snow storage.

Performing all field operations on the contour will slow overland flow and allow more opportunity for infiltration.

### **Considerations for Wildlife Food and Cover**

Leaving rows of unharvested crop standing at intervals across the field or adjacent to permanent cover will enhance the value of residues for wildlife food and cover. Leaving unharvested crop rows for two growing seasons will further enhance the value of these areas for wildlife.

Leave crop residues undisturbed after harvest (e.g., no shredding or baling) to maximize the cover and food source benefits for wildlife.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for establishment and operation of this practice shall be prepared for each field or treatment unit. Record the specifications using the practice implementation requirements document. The specifications shall identify, as appropriate—

- Purpose for applying the practice.
- Planned crop(s).
- Amount of residue produced by each crop.
- All field operations or activities that affect—
  - Residue orientation including height (where applicable).
  - Surface disturbance.
  - The amount of residue (pounds/acre or percent surface cover) required to accomplish the purpose, and the time of year it must be present.
- Planned soil tillage intensity rating STIR value, soil condition index value, and erosion rate.
- Target species of wildlife, if applicable.
- Benchmark and planned fuel consumption, if applicable.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Evaluate/measure the crop residues cover and orientation after each crop to ensure the planned amounts and orientation are being achieved. Adjust management as needed to either plan a new residue amount and orientation or adjust the planting and/or harvesting equipment.

Limited tillage is allowed to close or level ruts from harvesting equipment. No more than 10 percent of the field may be tilled for this purpose.

If there are areas of heavy residue accumulation (because of movement by water or wind) in the field, manage the residue prior to planting by: tilling, baling, scraping or spreading the residue so it does not interfere with planter operation.

To prevent residue hair pinning use a chaff spreader on the combine set to distribute residue as wide as the header. Managing chaff is critical to prevent stand loss due to poor seed soil contact from hair pinning or residue by disk openers in the seed furrow. No-till Residue Management begins at harvest of the previous crop.

To prevent an acid-roof after a few years continuous no-till where nitrogen fertilizers were surface applied, sample the top 2-3 inches separately and lime to correct surface acidity.

Before adopting no-till a soil compaction evaluation should be completed. Follow the guidelines in the MI NRCS Deep tillage standard (324) or MI Job sheets: 324.1 Soil Compaction Symptoms, Causes, Correction and Prevention and 324.2 Deep Tillage prior to no-tillage. For a Bio-till solution with cover crops see MI NRCS Agronomy Tech Notes 48,49,50,51 (FOTG Section 1 References Technical Notes Agronomy).

Success with no-till forage or cover crops requires a review of previous herbicide labels for crop rotation restrictions. Small grain sensitivity to Triazine carryover is as follows: oats, wheat, triticale, and cereal rye. See guidelines in MSUE Bulletin E-2880, Steps to Successful Forages or MI NRCS Agronomy Tech Note 9.

Using a true no-till system is the best way to sequester carbon, improve soil health, increase soil productivity and improve soil quality. Any transitional tillage generally offsets the soil carbon gains achieved with a long term no-till system.

## REFERENCES

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