

Visually Estimating Silage Corn with Rye Cover Crop Residue

Compare the amount of residue on your fields with the following photographs.
For an accurate estimate of residue cover look straight down, not across the field.



10%

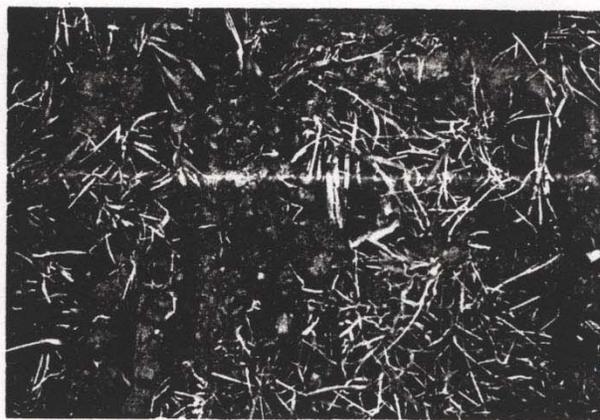


20%

Measure residue before and after any field operation to find out how much residue is buried with a single pass of that equipment. For soil conservation systems required in conservation plans, the residue cover is measured after planting.



30%



40%

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Measuring Crop Residue

for Silage Corn

What is Crop Residue?

Crop residue is the remains of crop plants after harvest. Residues are frequently left in the field to supply organic matter to the soil and help cover the soil surface, which reduces erosion.

Crop residue protects the soil from erosion by reducing raindrop impact and reducing runoff velocities. The percentage of crop residue cover on the field is an integral part of conservation tillage.

What is Conservation Tillage?

Conservation tillage is any tillage and planting system that leaves at least 30% of the soil surface covered by the previous year's crop residue or winter cover crop.

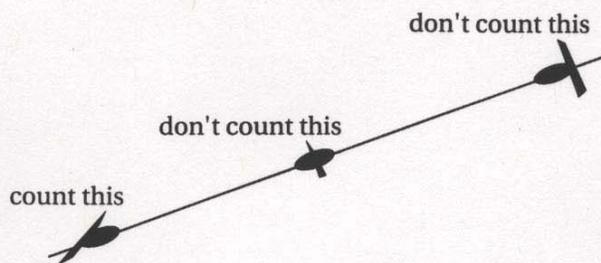
Benefits of Conservation Tillage

- reduces soil erosion
- reduces tillage costs
- reduces energy use
- saves time
- reduces labor
- improves water quality
- helps meet conservation compliance requirements of the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills



How to Measure Crop Residue

1. Use any line that is equally divided into 100 parts, such as a 50-foot nylon rope with 100 knots or marks, 6 inches apart. A 100-foot tape measure using 1-foot marks or a 50-foot tape measure using 6-inch and foot marks also works well.
2. Stretch the line diagonally across the crop rows. Count the number of times a piece of residue lies under one edge of a mark. It is important to use the same point on each mark for accuracy. Don't count residue smaller than 1/8 inch in diameter.
3. Walk the entire length of the rope or tape. The total number of marks with residue under them is the percent cover for the field.
4. Repeat the procedure at least 3 times in different areas of the field, and average the findings.



Where to Get Help

For more information on measuring crop residue and conservation tillage, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District or Soil Conservation Service office.