

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
RESIDUE AND TILLAGE MANAGEMENT
NO TILL/STRIP TILL/DIRECT SEED

(Ac.)

CODE 329

DEFINITION

Managing the amount, orientation and distribution of crop and other plant residue on the soil surface year round while limiting soil-disturbing activities to only those necessary to place nutrients, condition residue and plant crops.

injectors and applicators; in-row chisels; and similar implements that only disturb strips and slots. All other are considered to be full-width or capable of full disturbance and therefore not compatible.

PURPOSE

- Reduce sheet and rill erosion.
- Reduce wind erosion.
- Improve soil organic matter content.
- Reduce CO₂ losses from the soil.
- Reduce energy use
- Increase plant-available moisture
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Do not burn residue.

Distribute all residues uniformly over the entire field.

Do not perform full-width tillage, regardless of the depth of the tillage operation.

In determining the Soil Tillage Intensity Rating (STIR) value, include all field operations that are performed during the crop interval between harvest of the previous crop and harvest or termination of the current crop (includes fallow periods). The STIR value must not exceed 30.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all cropland and other land where crops are planted.

This practice includes planting methods commonly referred to as no-till, strip till, direct seed, zero till, slot till or zone till. Approved implements are: no-till and strip-till planters; certain drills and air seeders; strip-type fertilizer and manure

Additional Criteria to Reduce Sheet and Rill Erosion; Reduce Wind Erosion

The amount and orientation of surface residue needed and the amount of surface soil disturbance allowed to reduce erosion

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Contact Alice Begin at 207-990-568 or email alice.begin@me.usda.gov

to the planned soil loss objective shall be determined using the current approved water and/or erosion prediction technology. Calculations shall account for the effects of other practices in the management system.

Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Organic Matter Content

An evaluation of the cropping system using the current approved soil conditioning index (SCI) procedure must result in a positive trend.

Additional Criteria to Reduce CO₂ Loss from the Soil

In determining the Soil Tillage Intensity Rating (STIR) value, include all field operations that are performed during the crop interval between harvest of the previous crop and harvest or termination of the current crop. The STIR value must not exceed 20.

An evaluation of the cropping system, using the current approved soil conditioning index procedure must result in a positive trend.

Additional Criteria to Increase Plant – available Moisture

Reducing Evaporation from the Soil Surface. The annual Soil Tillage Intensity Rating (STIR) value for all soil-disturbing activities in the cropping system must be no more than 20.

Crop stubble height during the time evaporation losses can be 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.

These stubble heights shall be present on at least 60% of the field.

Trapping Snow. 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.

These heights shall be present over at least 50% of the field.

Perform fall field operations that disturb residue as close to perpendicular as possible to the direction of prevailing winds during the time that significant snowfall is expected to occur.

Additional Criteria to Provide Food and Cover for Wildlife

Determine the time that residue is present, the amount and orientation of residue and the height of stubble needed to provide adequate food and cover for the target species using an approved habitat evaluation procedure.

CONSIDERATIONS

General - Removing 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 amounts of crop residues necessary to achieve the purposes of this practice can be enhanced through the use of high residue crops and crop varieties, the use of cover crops, and adjustment of plant populations through seeding rates and row spacing.

Using no till/strip till/direct seed 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 provides additional resistance to sheet and rill erosion
- 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
- Planting with a single disk opener no-till drill will release less CO₂ than planting with a wide-point hoe/chisel opener air seeder drill.
- Soil disturbance that occurs when soil temperature are below 50 degree F will release less CO₂ than operations done when the soil is warmer.

Managing Soil Moisture and Protecting Crops from Freeze Damage

– The type, timing and depth of soil-disturbing activities all influence moisture loss. Shall operations (1-2 inches) or operations that do not invert the soil will reduce moisture loss compared to deeper operations or those that invert and mix the soil.

Soil-disturbing operations performed when the soil surface is moist will result in greater moisture loss than operations done when the top two or three inches of soil have dried.

Leaving stubble taller than the minimum required will increase the relative humidity close to the soil surface, which reduces in rate of evaporative loss from the soil.

Leaving stubble taller than the 10-inch minimum will trap more snow and provide better protection to plants from freezing or desiccation.

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.

Wildlife Food and Cover – Leaving rows of unharvested crop standing at intervals across the field adjacent to permanent cover will enhance the value of residues for wildlife food and cover. Leaving unharvested crop rows for two growing

A field border planted to permanent vegetation can:

- Allow unobstructed turning for equipment
- Eliminate unproductive end rows
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife
- Provide travel lanes for farming operations

Increasing Soil Organic Matter Level and Reducing CO₂ Loss – CO₂ loss is directly related to the volume of soil disturbed, the intensity of the disturbance and the soil moisture content and soil temperature at the time the disturbance occurs. The following guidelines can make this practice more effective:

- Shallow soil disturbance (1-3 inches) releases less CO₂ than deeper operations.
- 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.

seasons will further enhance the value of these areas for wildlife.

Leave crop residues undisturbed after harvest (do not shred or roll) to maximize their cover and food source benefits.

Avoid disturbing standing stubble or heavy residue during the nesting season for ground nesting species.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare specifications for establishment and operation of this practice for each field or treatment until according to the Criteria and Considerations described in this standard. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

Document in the plans and specifications:

- Planned crop(s)
- Specify the type of equipment for No Till/Strip Till/Direct Seed for each crop
- Specify the planned residue amounts for: (1) after harvest of the prior crop and (2) the planned residue cover after seeding the planned crop.

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.