

## **COST SHARE FUELS CONSERVATION IN SCOTLAND COUNTY**

Cotton acreage is not the only item on the increase in Scotland County. The Scotland County Soil and Water Conservation District has been working to protect soil resources and make cotton compatible with water quality and erosion control goals. The North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program has been the primary source of funds on cotton acreage. Through this effort, 5,000 acres has been entered in conservation agreements since 1996.

Residue levels must be maintained at 60% during the growing season, so cover crops are required as a residue supplement due to the nature of cotton production. Contracts are for 3 years with \$60 paid the first year, then residue is maintained for the life of the contract. Cooperators have a lifetime cap of \$15,000.

Harvey Edge farms 2,500 acres of cotton in several areas of Scotland County. He began residue management in cotton in 1997 with 500 acres. He states that he has enjoyed the results of the no-till system, especially with improved chemicals and cotton varieties. Edge shreds the stalks and applies chicken litter to meet the residue and nutrient needs. He has made this change with modifications to conventional equipment. The advantages include reduced labor and fuel costs, equipment savings, and less risk in these uncertain times. Yields have been consistent with conventional operations.

In 2001, Haynes Stone Farms made the change to strip-till cotton on their 1,700 acres. They had worked reduced tillage in grain crops and saw an opportunity for their cotton operation. Bracy Stone said that their choice cover crop was rye, which they try to burn down when it reaches 18 inches in height. Another rule is to minimize equipment in the field. Tires cause problems leaving ruts that remain in reduced tillage fields.

In the year ending June 30, 2002, \$109,000 was available in Scotland County. Scotland Soil and Water Conservation District's Agriculture Cost Share Technician, Bunny Anderson, says there is always a need for additional funds to meet the applications received.