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ECONOMICAL WEED CONTROL MEANS NO-TILL

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Now, more than ever, folks are asking for ways to save money on weed control. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reduce inputs. It takes very few bushels- even of low-priced commodities- to buy expensive agrichemicals. The most expensive weed control program is the one that doesn't work. Expensive herbicides usually offer more than do cheap ones. Every field is different and only you know whether bargain programs will work on your farm.

However, a fairly consistent way to save money is to no till. There are two important disclaimers #1: True, 100% "Never Till" may not be the way to go, but there are savings in eliminating unnecessary tillage trips so most "reduced-till" methods are valid. Disclaimer #2: You may not see an immediate benefit as the savings are often hidden in things like equipment ownership costs, wear and tear and timeliness.

For no-till or stale seedbed in any crop, a basic program is a quart equivalent of old Roundup or any similar glyphosate product. The quart-equivalent rate is preferred over pint rates for tougher weeds. If you run the economics that will cost you roughly \$12/A in chemical and application. If you only make 3 tillage trips, it's a break-even deal. However, every we see fields getting five and six tillage passes that could be replaced with a single pass of a 60-ft boom running 10 miles per hour. WARNING: Roundup drift is deadly to corn, be careful when corn is near a no-till cotton, rice or bean field.

Target your application two weeks ahead of planting. Two weeks is not an exact time. Instead it is the most flexible time frame and will work well if you plant one week later or three. Monitor the progress of your burndown. If it didn't work, it's easier to fix before planting than after. While most folks get by with Roundup or a Roundup tank mix, the official Milan TN no-till recommendation includes a second burndown at planting.

You need to beware of some key weeds that don't burst into flames when sprayed with Roundup. Primrose, curly dock, vetch and smartweed and ryegrass need other herbicides. You also need to be aware of cutworms- ask your favorite entomologist about a pyrethroid application at planting. Finally, visit with established no-tillers: there some tricks that can give you even cheaper burndown programs (Atrazine + oil in corn, 2,4-D in beans, etc).

Don't have a no-till planter? Our favorite Ag-engineers William Casaday and Van Ayers have told us that modern, conventional planters with double-disk openers do pretty good of no-tilling on Delta soils. With a stale seedbed system (following fall tillage), crop residue won't be a big problem. No-till planters and drills are super, but you can wait for better commodity prices before you invest in one.

If you can eliminate three trips you are at least breaking even. "Never-till" folks find savings in

owning fewer and smaller tractors and not owning tillage equipment. It's hard to put an exact dollar figure on timeliness, but given a wet, late spring: when if FINALLY dries out, you can start disking, hipping and knocking OR, you can just go plant. With diesel prices high, and commodity prices low- unnecessary tillage is unnecessary expense.