STRIP-TILL FARMER

50 Tips, Tricks and Techniques to Be a Better Strip-Tiller

Time-tested strip-till strategies from farmers, suppliers and industry experts gathered from roundtable discussions at the National Strip-Tillage Conference.

By Jack Zemlicka

50 Tips, Tricks and Techniques for Improving Strip-Till Success

The most practical and productive advice and insight on fertilization practices, cover cropping and berm building from past National Strip-Tillage Conference roundtable discussions.

Every Summer, hundreds of strip-tillers gather at the National Strip-Tillage Conference to network and learn about successes, challenges and trends from each other. Some of the most valuable knowledge-sharing takes place during the popular strip-till roundtable sessions.

This year, we've rounded up the best advice and takeaways shared from roundtable sessions during the last three conferences. Whether you are looking for better cover cropping tips, advice on the best fertilizer to band in your strip or ways to incorporate the latest precision farming practices on your operation, you'll get experience-based expertise below that can improve productivity and profitability.

Focus on Fertility

1. Use a controlled release nitrogen like ESN and 28% liquid N in fall strip-till because it will be micro- or bio-friendly to soils.

2. Consider a starter fertilizer package on the planter when using N, phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) in fall strips.

3. Another option is moving the starter application from the planter to a spring strip-till bar for the same effect.

4. Always research proper depth of fertilizer placement. For dry applications, spread to 10-inch depths.

5. Don't cut N application rates, especially when banding during the first few years of strip-till.

6. Understand that banding different fertilizer products require different depths for different crops.

7. Some of the best banding results often show up at 6-8 inches on band depth.

8. Ammonium Sulfate (AMS) can reduce the risk of N volatilization, but it won't eliminate it.

9. Broadcast rates often have to be 50% higher than banded application to achieve the same effect on crops.

10. For high pH levels in your soil, consider putting down almost 50% of your P and K banded in the strip. Banding it will protect and preserve the nutrients it as opposed to broadcast application.

11. Five gallons per acre of 10-34-0 as a starter fertilizer applied in the strip can get plants off to a good

start in spring.

12. If you see an early reduction in N use, it's likely because you were over-applying.

13. Minimize application of "leachable" fertilizers in the fall.

14. Consider applying a good portion of your N with your pre-plant strip-till pass, but don't get it too hot that you risk seed burn.

15. Plan spring N applications to allow for a window between building the strip and planting, depending on soil conditions and soil types.

16. Banded strip-till fertilizer placement reduces the overall amount needed to grow a profitable crop.

17. Consider applying N with coulter units rather than shovel units to get fertilizer closer to the seed.

18. If possible, use irrigation to deliver nutrients through fertigation.

Pushing For Precision

19. Auto-steering is essential for more consistent passes, less operator fatigue, watching implements closer and developing controlled traffic zones.

20. Mapping data influences all management decisions and can improve renter/landlord relationships.

21. RTK and a controlled traffic system combine to reduce compaction and a less skilled operator can achieve optimal results.

22. Assisted steering is an economical auto-steering option. Assuming strip-tillers have a monitor in place, assisted-steering systems can cost $3,000 to $4,000 to incorporate, and another $1,500 to $3,000 for a GPS receiver.

23. Mobile computing/wireless data transfer gets you an immediate access to yield data you can turn into fertilizer maps within hours after harvest.

24. Having the same GPS equipment in the planter tractor and the combine equipment facilitates crop data use.

25. Bringing collected field data together and using it to reach optimal yield will be a profitable combination.

26. Consider investing in "smart" displays with task controller support, because they offer advanced integration of equipment through ISOBUS connections, and also allow more automated options to manage seed and fertilizer inputs.

27. The emergence of wireless data transfer software is making uploading of A-B lines more seamless for tech-savvy operators.

Building A Better Berm

28. Make sure your strip is as wide as the planter row unit ensuring you are planting 100% in the strip.

29. The better your build berms in the fall, spring strip-till won't be needed.

30. Consider using a rotary hoe in spring to dress fall strips.

31. Berm height is often regional-specific and dependent upon what the farmer is looking for height and depth.

32. Make sure that you "till" out the knife slot that could potentially be left in the strip to avoid a pocket in the berm.

33. Consider seed depth and spacing. Fall strip-till may work better if strips have firmed up during the winter.

34. In spring, avoid using deep shanks in favor of rolling coulters.

35. Strip-till in the fall is determined by soil conditions not allowing for spring work.

36. Farmers may have more time to strip-till in the fall, and the ground tends to be dryer than in spring.

37. Make sure to plant in the same direction as you strip-till and with the same width machine.

38. Stay on the strip year after year as it won't disturb surrounding soil structure.

39. For corn-on-corn strips, consider moving over 8 inches each year to stay close to the fertilizer zone.

40. Run population checks because every farm is different.

41. Row cleaners on your strip-till rig can help prevent hair pinning and contribute to a great stand.

42. Strip-till can help reduce the amount of irrigation needed.

43. Rule-of-thumbs from industry experts —8-inch wide strips, 3-4-inch berms and 5-8-inch depths for banded fertilizer applications.

Cover Crop Coordination

44. Kill cover crops early tomatoes for frost protection.

45. Consider planting cover crops with a twin-row planter and plant corn and soybeans between the rows.

46. Cover crops can be a good weed control ally.

47. Selecting the right cover crop for strip-till depends on a farmer's goals. A dairy farmer looking for a cover

crop to double as forage may look at different species than a strip-tiller with an eye on nutrient retention.

48. Experiment with the right application method — aerial seeding, drilling or broadcast — to achieve the best results.

49. A priority with cover crops is erosion control. Secondary to that would be to hold the nutrients in place, and third is to work in some weed control.

50. Don't be afraid to experiment with different variety mixes on test plots before incorporating cover crops on your entire operation.

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