



Summer Newsletter

July 2007

2007 GCTA Annual Meeting

The Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance's 13th Annual meeting was held in Tifton March 6-7 at the Tift County Agriculture Center. About 50 members attended the meeting, which began Tuesday evening with the keynote speaker Donnie Smith, Governor Sonny Perdue's Agricultural Affairs Liaison. Donnie discussed the Governor's Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Award, which is given during National Agriculture Awareness Week to honor farmers for good stewardship of all aspects of the environment in their farming practices. GCTA member Don Register of Chula was recognized as a regional finalist for the award. Donnie also talked about developments related to Georgia's first wood-based cellulosic ethanol plant in Treutlen County.

On Wednesday morning, the technical portion of the program included a presentation by Amanda Ziehl showing the economic benefits of conservation tillage, Dr. Andrew Price discussing the importance of heavy residue cover to help control troublesome weeds, and a lively presentation from the tag team duo of Drs. Diane Rowland and Wilson Faircloth dispelling myths associated with conservation tillage practices. The business meeting was held just before lunch with a presentation of the budget and re-election of Lamar Black, Don Register, and Ron

Barentine to 3-year terms on the GCTA Board. Lunch was some fabulous smoked pork chops and fixings catered by Stephen Hobbs. After lunch many of the participants headed to the center pivot area behind the Rural Development Center to hear Dr. Glen Harris discuss results from a cover crop planting date study that he and Dr. Dewey Lee were conducting.

The 14th annual meeting will be coming up in early 2008. If there are topics that you would particularly like to see addressed at the annual meeting, please contact one of your board members. The annual meeting is a great opportunity for you to learn new information and ask questions of other conservation tillage farmers.

For more info, contact:

harry.schomberg@ars.usda.gov

Can You Help?

GCTA is a partner in the Team Conservation Tillage exhibit at the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie. This exhibit consists of displays and demonstrations of conservation tillage principles. GCTA members are needed to help answer questions from visitors and talk with other farmers. If you can work at the exhibit, even for an hour, please contact Gary Hawkins, 229-386-3377,

ghawkins@uga.edu.

Upcoming Events

July 26- Conservation Tillage Meeting sponsored by East Central Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance. Midville Experiment Station, noon. Program by Drs. Diane Rowland and Wilson Faircloth on "Myth Busters of Conservation Tillage". Lunch will be served. Call your Extension Agent to make reservations for lunch.

August 14-The Mid State Conservation Tillage Alliance is having a meeting and field day, 10:00am, Steakhouse Restaurant, Hawkinsville, GA. Topics include: timely cover crop planting, wheat production, on-farm biodiesel production, resistant pigweed control, conventional cotton production, auto tractor steering and conservation tillage, Mythbusters in Conservation Tillage, and peanut production. After lunch, the field tour will look at CT peanuts, cotton, and the use of auto steer. For more info, contact Ronnie Barentine, Extension Coordinator Pulaski County, 478-783-1171.

October 16-18-Sunbelt Agricultural Expo, Moultrie, GA. Please see box at left. www.sunbeltexpo.com

NOTE-The Powerpoint presentation "Mythbusters of Conservation Tillage" is also available on the GCTA website:

www.gcta-ga.org

30th Southern Conservation Tillage Conference

The 30th Southern Conservation Agricultural Systems Conference (formerly called the Southern Conservation Tillage Conference) was held June 25-27, 2007 at the North Florida Research and Education Center at Quincy, Florida. The meeting was chaired by Dr. David Wright, a long-time friend of GCTA.

With a theme of “Sod Based Rotations – The Next Step after Conservation Tillage”, speakers from several states from Virginia to Texas presented data on various topics on Tuesday and a field tour was held Wednesday morning. The Tuesday agenda consisted of 21 presentations and 25 posters separated into four subject areas: Conservation Cropping Systems, Management and Equipment Application for Conservation Tillage, Use of Technology in Agricultural Conservation Systems, and Plant Responses to Rotations and Conservation Cropping Systems. The presentations under the **cropping systems** topic explored the ideas of sod based rotation, economics of a whole farm system, joint adoption of tillage practices and global warming and conservation tillage. The **management** topic presentations discussed pasture planting and availability for grazing cattle, traffic patterns on soil compaction, altering paratill locations and energy requirements. The **technology** topic had presentations ranging from precision ag for enhanced livestock to thermal imagery to Ag Climate. And finally, the **plant responses** topic explored the ideas of viral suppression in peanuts to vegetable production with a couple of presentations on perennial grasses also included. Overall, the conference provided a good bit of information that showed the attendees where conservation tillage is and where we are headed.

The presentations are available at: <http://www.ag.auburn.edu/auxiliary/nsdl/scasc/meetings.html>. Proceedings from the 2007 meeting are also available on CD as well as a CD with the proceedings of each of the 30 meetings. If you want a copy of the CDs, contact Kirk Iversen, at kiversen@auburn.edu or 334-844-4741.

Twelve states were represented at the meeting. Georgia attendees are shown in the accompanying photo.



Dr. Wright expressed appreciation for the sponsors, including the Conservation Technology Information Center, North Florida Research & Education Center, Cotton, Inc., the National Soil Dynamics Laboratory (Auburn), and others.

The Conference was first held in Griffin, Georgia in 1978 and is rotated around the southern states. Georgia will serve as host again in 2008. A planning committee is being organized for next year’s conference, to be held in Tifton.

In it’s 30th year, the Southern Conservation Agricultural Systems Conference exists to provide for the exchange of information about conservation tillage and related technology with the objective of expanding conservation tillage systems in the southern US to control erosion and reduce environmental degradation.

For more info on this article, contact Jimmy Dean at deanagro@bellsouth.net and Gary Hawkins at ghawkins@uga.edu

GCTA Supporting National Tillage Alliance

GCTA is a partner in the development of a national conservation tillage alliance.

A committee led by Karen Scanlon, Executive Director of the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), is working to develop a producer-led national conservation tillage alliance. The possibility of a national organization has been discussed for several years and this time it should bear fruit.

The purpose of establishing a national alliance is to give state and local alliances a means to communicate, share information, and share success stories with other alliances. Hopefully, the development of a national organization will give conservation tillage more publicity and will aid in getting more research funds for this economically and environmentally sound crop production system.

A committee is in the very early stages of working on developing the framework for the organization. For instance, a name has not yet been chosen. Jimmy Dean, GCTA Board Member, is representing GCTA on the committee. He met with some of the committee representatives at the Southern Conservation Agricultural Systems Conference at Quincy, FL in June. His trip to the meeting was sponsored by CTIC. Jimmy is also participating in monthly teleconferences with the group.

For more info, contact Jimmy Dean at: deanagro@bellsouth.net



Karen Scanlon, Executive Director of CTIC, greets participants at the SCAS Conference in Quincy.

Ready for Cover Crops?



Georgia
Conservation
Tillage
Alliance

In the Introduction to the upcoming 3rd edition of *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*, editor

Andy Clark starts out with the usual list of benefits from cover crops “reduce erosion, improve soil, smother weeds, enhance nutrient and moisture availability, help control many pests and bring a host of other benefits to your farm” and he continues with “they can reduce costs, increase profits... and make you a better neighbor, too”. He ends with “there is a cover crop to fit just about every farming situation” and he’s right, it just might take some looking to find it. That is one reason why every farmer should have a copy of this book. The pdf version of the 3rd edition can be downloaded for free from the Sustainable Agriculture Network web site. (<http://www.sare.org/publications/covercrops/covercrops.pdf>)

With cover crops offering so many valuable services, why do producers often fail to gain these benefits? Weather conditions, equipment failure, and other events contribute to unrealized potential but planning ahead can help increase chances of maximizing returns from a cover crop investment. Mid-summer is a good time to start planning your cover crop strategies and doing things to insure success. The following are a few items to be thinking about and activities you can do to enhance the benefits of your cover crops.

1. Gather information about the cover crops you want to grow and check on availability of varieties. Although new varieties of cover crops are not released as frequently as varieties of cotton, corn or other agronomic crops, new ones are released periodically. Check with your county agent or NRCS personnel to determine the best cover crops for your conservation tillage needs.
2. Check your planting equipment to make sure it is in good shape. Being able to put seed at the proper depth is critical for getting a good stand. Drilling cover crops produces a better stand than broadcasting for most cover crops. Remember, if you broadcast, to increase the seeding rate to compensate for lower germination rates. Additionally, you should make sure your equipment is set to handle the cover crop you are thinking about planting especially if it is something new that you have not used in the past.
3. Plant as early as possible. Research from South Carolina shows that by mid-April small grains planted in mid-October produced 3500 lb per acre of biomass while small grains planted in mid-December only produced 735 lb per acre. That’s

almost five times as much residue which can provide soil cover to reduce weeds and water loss to evaporation and can help build soil organic matter.

4. Fertilize cover crops. Adding 30 to 40 lb of N to rye or wheat at planting can increase residue production by 50% and is particularly helpful in N-limited soils. Added N not only increases early-season growth but it can be very beneficial for the development of a healthy root system needed for fast growth in the spring. The addition of a little extra fertilizer to those areas of the field that traditionally show low cover crop yields may be beneficial in increasing the biomass.
5. Inoculate legumes. If you’re growing a legume cover crop, use fresh inoculant that contains the type of bacteria recommended for that legume. Keep inoculated seed as cool as possible. Remember, bacteria in inoculant are sensitive to drying out and to hot conditions. The benefit of proper inoculation is that legumes can provide 45 to 60 lb of N or nearly half the amount needed for a cotton crop.
6. Allow cover crops to grow as long as possible to maximize residue production. Most winter annual cover crops used in the South produce a significant proportion of their growth during March and April. It is not unusual for the amount of residue to double during the four weeks from mid-March to mid-April. Most recommendations call for killing a cover crop three weeks before planting to allow soil moisture to replenish and to avoid problems with growth inhibiting chemicals produced as cover crop residues initially begin to decompose.
7. Minimize tillage. Adjust your planting equipment to leave the maximum amount of residue possible on the soil surface. Cover crop residues decompose three to five times faster when incorporated into the soil and many of the benefits mentioned above are lost when residues are incorporated.

There are many other things you can do to get ready for your cover crop. A little planning now will help maximize returns from your cover crop investment and insure your cover crop works in the way you intended. So remember the seven steps to a good cover crop: 1) Gather information, 2) Check equipment 3) Plant early, 4) Fertilize, 5) Inoculate, 6) Allow growth, and 7) Minimize tillage. If you do these things, the amount of cover you see will and should surprise you.

Contact Harry Schomberg or Gary Hawkins for more cover crop information.
--- harry.schomberg@ars.usda.gov and ghawkins@uga.edu

Conservation Tillage Alliances

Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance
Coffee County Conservation Tillage Alliance, Inc.
East Central Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance
Mid State Conservation Tillage Alliance
Southeast Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance
Upper Suwannee Conservation Tillage Alliance
Worth County Conservation Tillage Alliance

GCTA Board Members

Lamar Black, Millen
Ronnie Barentine, Hawkinsville
Jimmy Dean, Athens
Jim Donaldson, Metter
Glen Harris, Tifton
Bob Rawlins, Rebecca
Don Register, Chula
Steve Spooner, Sylvester
Robert Thompson, Kathleen

WWW.GCTA-GA.ORG

Ag Wonders of the World

The American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers voted **Conservation Tillage** as the seventh most important achievement that has changed the world in the last 100 years. Here is the entire list:

1. Development of agricultural tractor
2. Rural electrification
3. Self-propelled combine
4. Center pivot irrigation
5. International Harvester cotton picker
6. Milking machine
- 7. Conservation tillage**
8. ASAE Standardization procedure
9. Rubber tractor tires
10. Refrigerated on-farm milk storage



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