Crop Residue

Soil and Water Conservation Society
South Dakota Chapter

Management of crop residue provides our best, most economical and easiest erosion control method for protecting the soil from wind and water erosion.

Residue is essential to maintain a fertile and productive soil and is largely responsible for building and maintaining organic matter. Organic matter is often called the "life blood of the soil" and its presence is a measure of soil productivity. Plant residue itself is a source of plant nutrients and is essential to control erosion and maintain a fertile and productive soil.

Crop residue protects water supplies by increasing water infiltration and reducing sediment. It improves air quality by reducing wind erosion and ties up plant nutrients that would otherwise become pollutants in ground waters, lakes, and streams.

Residue improves the soil's tilth, increasing the water intake and holding capacity of the soil, for increased yields and lower production costs.

BACKGROUND

The value of crop residue for protecting fields and maintaining soil fertility for future food and fiber production is often misunderstood.

As a result crop residue is being used for livestock feed and for other commercial uses such as energy, building materials, plastics, and other synthetics. This widespread industrial use of crop residue is resulting in soil deterioration and destruction of the soil resource.

THE CHAPTER'S POSITION

The South Dakota Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society is a voluntary organization of practicing land operators, professional conservationists, and other concerned citizens. Members share a common interest in advancing the science and art of good land and water use worldwide. The Chapter believes that good crop residue management is necessary for sound land use.

It is the position of the Chapter that:

- crop residue is a valuable commodity and not a waste. Residue should be managed in a way that sustains soil, water, and related resources. Crop residue should be removed for commercial uses only if there is an excess amount of residue available to protect the soil from erosion and if removal will not deplete the soil of its nutrient reservoir.

- primary use of residue should be to protect the soil for future food and fiber production with consideration given to wildlife and other concerns, such as air and water quality,

- units of government, groups, and others working with land owners need to be knowledgeable about crop residue management in order to promote the maintenance of sufficient residue on the land for good soil stewardship. Operators need to know the importance and values of crop residue so correct land management decisions are made.

- funding proposals for utilization of plant residue need to be scrutinized carefully before approval.

- further research should be carefully considered and selected to implement proper management of crop residue.

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