

CONSERVATION FARMING - GOOD FARMERS MANAGE IT

David Gilbert,
Department of Agriculture,
Sydney NSW

Conservation farming is concerned with the conservation of our resources to ensure viable, long-term production of food and fibre. It is not just concerned with tillage but with all farm practices, including those associated with pasture and livestock production. Although conservation tillage is a major part of the conservation farming programme, trees on farms, soil acidity, salinity and energy use are also important.

Conservation farming is a philosophy for farming. Many of its practices are still being developed. Others are well established, but vary considerably throughout the State according to soil type and climatic factors.

Traditional farming practices in New South Wales have contributed to general widespread physical and chemical degradation of soils. The main symptoms of this degradation are:

- * Soil erosion.
- * Low chemical fertility.
- * Poor physical fertility (surface crusting, compaction and poor drainage).
- * Soil acidity.
- * Tree decline.

Research in both the north and south of the State has shown that the adoption of the principles of conservation farming will not only reverse soil degradation trends but can also improve soils and increase productivity in the long term.

The recommended conservation farming practices will be consistent with the following principles:

- * Minimum cultivation.
- * Retention of crop residues.
- * Judicious livestock management.
- * Regeneration and establishment of trees.
- * Sound irrigation practices.

The aim of the programme is to manage agricultural resources in NSW to ensure sustained, viable agricultural production. The programme will be conducted on two distinct but complementary levels: firstly that of community awareness, to establish with the general community that the adoption of a conservation ethic is essential for sustainable agricultural production; and secondly adoption of conservation farming principles by farmers.

The Department of Agriculture and the Soil Conservation Service are working closely with the rural community to ensure the success of the programme, and therefore the long-term protection of our agricultural resources.

1. Prepare good seed beds so that the seed is placed in contact