

2015 Nebraska Extension No-till, Cover Crops, and Grazing Bus Tour Featured Producers

Steve Wiese has a cattle operation near Clatonia, NE and some irrigated cropland near Crete. Steve was hauling a lot of feed for his cattle from the irrigated site after experimenting with cover crops as a silage feed. He decided to expand his cattle operation and build a cattle facility at the Crete site, complete with living quarters for a student intern. He no-tills cereal rye after soybean harvest and uses that as cover to protect his soil over the winter and through the spring rainy season. After chopping the cereal rye as a forage, he no-tills double crop corn in late May or early June to be cut for silage. Adding rye to his corn/soybean rotation kept the regular cash crops, cut fertilizer expenses, and added soil health benefits. It has given him new efficiencies and has added diversity to his operation.

Josh Lloyd of Oakhill, KS has been using no-till systems to regenerate soil on his rain-fed farm for over 15 years. Josh manages the five-generation family farm to mimic Mother Nature by using cash crops and cover crops to keep the soil covered the year around. He has one field that has never been tilled as he converted a native pasture to no-till cropland several years ago. His crop rotation is wheat-wheat-double crop or cover crop-corn or milo-soybean-soybean, depending on the field and the resource needs. His double crop has been sunflowers, soybeans, milo, or corn, depending on the year and the moisture outlook. A cow-calf operation was integrated back into the operation two years ago as a way to provide short-term income from cover crops.

Gail Fuller of Emporia, KS has been experimenting with no-till since the mid-1980s and has been 100% since 1995. The further he gets into his journey, the more soil health has become his main focus. Gail feels the best and fastest way to improve soil health is through the use of cover crops and annual forages. He also believes crop diversity, both above and below ground, is the key to building soil health. He grows about a dozen cash crops and uses over 50 plant species as cover or companion crops, planting almost 11 months a year, compared to only planting two months a year in a conventional rotation. He is bringing livestock into the operation using cattle to graze his covers and forages using intensive, rotational, and mob grazing methods. He also has swine, sheep, and chickens and is adding more annual forages as his livestock operation expands.

Keith and Ben Thompson of Osage City, KS are father and son no-tillers who are always looking for ways to add more diversity to their operation. They raise corn, milo, soybeans, wheat, sunflowers, annual forages, and cover crops in various rotations to help build the soil and maximize the size of their cattle herd. Ben runs the livestock part of the operation as Keith says he's too old to become a cowboy. He uses portable electric fencing with automatic gate openers to mob graze the cover crops and annual forages for only a short period of time. Their goal is to have something growing in their soil at all times, whether it be crops to sell, forages for the cattle to eat, or cover crops to feed the soil system.

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