

Montgomery's No-Till contest outshines summer heat

By Nancy Holt, district secretary, Clarksville Field office



The month of June was brutal and dry for most Montgomery farmers, and this is where no-till planting out-performs strip-till or conventional tillage planting. This spring, the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted a no-till tobacco contest and virtual field day to promote the benefits of healthy soil through no-till planting methods, specifically, tobacco. Cumberland River Compact sponsored the \$500 first place prize and applicants were able to use the district's no-till setter at a reduced price.

Timothy Head set a total of five acres of dark fired tobacco this year, about three and a half more than last.

"It yielded about a hundred pounds more to the acre than conventional till," Head said. "the biggest hurdle was getting the setter set for your ground, but once you get it, you get it. If you're used to row cropping or any no-till, it's no big deal."

Head's patch of ground was first disturbed two to three years ago, and he suggested not using a setter in wetter areas. He went on to say that "I've done the math, its more expensive to break up the ground, \$25-50 per acre." His planting depth was three inches and markers for the setter would have been handy, but overall, he prefers no-till.



Timothy Head using the district's two row setter.



Doyle Moore, Jr. agrees. All his crops are in no-till methods and his six-acre field of tobacco was no different this year.

"I don't regret it at all, especially during this dry spell," Moore said.

Strip till tobacco is a common technique in this county, but no till tobacco is a relatively new method of setting tobacco here. The Montgomery Soil and Water Conservation District and the Cumberland River Compact's partnership was



Board members and Kevin Hart, Montgomery Field Office district conservationist, evaluate Moore's field.

invaluable in providing the tools for producers to try setting no till tobacco without making the costly equipment purchases.

"The producers in this contest have done an excellent job as early adopters of a different way to set tobacco, while improving their soil health at the same time," said Kevin Hart, district conservationist for the Montgomery Field Office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "The four keys to managing for soil health are: minimizing soil disturbance, maximizing plant diversity thru multi-species cover crops, keep living roots in the soil as much as possible and keeping the soil always covered. A valuable benefit these producers are enjoying from these techniques is more soil moisture available to their crops. Through July 5, Montgomery County has been experiencing moderate drought conditions, yet these no till fields have more moisture available at the root zone than adjacent conventional tilled tobacco fields. Another important benefit is reduced trips across the fields, which has an immediate impact on the bottom line. With the huge increase in fuel costs this growing season, this benefit is more important than ever."

Hart and district board members made site visits at the thirty-day mark to evaluate the tobacco of each applicant. Cover crops, amount of no-till residue (density percentage of ground cover from cover crop and height), percent of slope, root evaluations for density,

measurement of yield and quality and assessment of cleanliness of lower leaves were some of the criteria for judging. With these evaluations in mind, first place prize was awarded to Timothy Head. Richard Davis, District board member said, "Ultimately, this year's contest is a hard choice. All of them have done well considering the lack of rainfall. There

were some things that set the winner apart though, mainly yield."

For more information on using the no-till method, visit www.MontgomerySoilConservation.com or call our office, 931-368-0252 x 3.



Doyle Moore Jr's first no-till first no-till tobacco crop.