

Part of No-Till From the Very Beginning

Famous French author Victor Hugo once wrote, “All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come.”

In the mid 20th century, especially for agriculture, no-tillage was such an idea. Now, well into the 21st century, it remains the best way ever found to conserve our greatest, God-given, natural resource — the life sustaining topsoils of the world.

Huge Changes Ahead

I was there at the beginning of modern no-tillage crop production. In the spring of 1962, just south of Herndon, Ky., my father, Harry M. Young, Jr., was the first American farmer to try this revolutionary idea. I was 11 years old then, and didn’t recognize the huge changes that were about to take place in farming.

My father, however, did have the vision. A mental light had turned on

in 1961 when he saw a small University of Illinois test plot in Dixon Springs, Ill. George McKibben, a man well ahead of his time, was the one behind that pivotal plot.

Since my father had been a University of Kentucky statewide extension specialist during the 1940s and 50s, he understood the importance of test plots. He decided to try McKibben’s idea on his own farm.

That winter, he adapted an old mule-



Darrell Bruggink

WHERE NO-TILL GOT ITS START. John Young (left) and his son, Alex, represent the fifth and sixth generations to run the Young’s 4,200-acre farm near Herndon, Ky. A historical marker sits at the site where John’s father, Harry Young Jr., planted the first commercial no-till plot on 7/10ths of an acre in 1962.

drawn two-row planter and mounted it underneath a Farmall 140 tractor. (See page 51.) That became the first no-till planter ever used by a farmer.

No-tillage worked as promised, and continues to work. (As I write this, we are in the process of harvesting no-tilled corn for the 56th consecutive year on our family farm.)

During the next several years, along with University of Kentucky agronomist Shirley Phillips, my father put his visionary insight to work, both in writing his books and speaking at many meetings across the grain belt. He was always willing to speak to a group of farmers, even when many in the crowd were skeptical, or even cynical.

In those meetings, he loved to get tough questions about no-tillage. He had already asked, and answered, those same tough questions while making no-tillage work in his own farming operation.

Another Pioneer

Another man who saw the vision in those early days was Frank Lessiter, the founder of Lessiter Media, the long-time editor of *No-Till Farmer* and the author of this book. My father, who died in 1988, always spoke highly of Frank

Back in the early days, Frank flew down to our western Kentucky farm on more than one occasion to visit with my father. He was a keen enthusiast for no-till from the beginning, and remains so today.

No-Till Farmer has served as the unofficial extension service for the world. Everything from innovative machinery and weed control, to variety selection and cover crops



John Harvey, Frank Lessiter

WORTH THE RISK. After no-tilling corn in 1962, Harry Young (shown here in both photos) worked with University of Kentucky agronomist Shirley Phillips to perfect his no-till system. At the time, Young didn't anticipate how no-till would grow. "His training as an ag economist, though, told him it would save labor, fuel, machinery and soil, and it was well worth trying," says his son, John Young.

have been studied, scrutinized and presented by the editors to farmers and agribusinessmen. They have been the preminent leaders in spreading the word about major agricultural improvements that have come along through the years.

Frank knows that even the best idea remains a dream until it is put into actual practice. He has been both coach and cheerleader for countless farmers and innovators who want to find a better way of growing crops.

This book, which is all about the history of no-tillage, will be a welcome addition to the library of anyone who likes to eat. Since our food comes from the land, we should all care about conserving our soil and water. After all, the next generation will want to eat as well.

No-tillage is the best tool we have as we search for truly sustainable agriculture throughout the world. That should be reason enough to see just what has

been done during the past 56 years in the life of modern no-tillage.

Look to the Future

One final word is in order for the readers of this historical book. Don't ever assume that what has already been done is all that needs to be done. While many no-till pioneers are featured here, I believe they would all acknowledge that their discoveries and research were only scratching the surface in the search for the perfect way to feed a hungry world.

Thanks to the efforts of Frank Lessiter and many other contributors, this book will show you that no-tillage is much different today than it was in 1962. I firmly believe it will be much different in another 50 years than it is today.

We should never give up the effort to improve on what we have. At the same time, we should never forget where we have been.

— John S. Young, Herndon, Ky.

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— John S. Young