

HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THE CONSERVATION
TILLAGE INFORMATION CENTER

Agricultural leaders in both the private and public sectors have information and ideas, methods and media for making conservation tillage work throughout the diverse croplands of the United States. Indeed the problem is not enough sources of information about conservation tillage but rather collecting, organizing and disseminating this information.

Setting up a national clearinghouse for conservation tillage information, therefore, became the task at hand for a group of executives representing chemical companies, farm machinery manufacturers, several conservation and agribusiness associations and a number of agencies, including the USDA Soil Conservation Service, the Cooperative Extension Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

According to Dick Foell, Product Manager, Herbicides, for Chevron Chemical Company, it really started as an idea to form a no-till club. Chevron sponsored a meeting, during the October 1981 American Agricultural Editors' Association annual meeting in Chicago, for a number of agribusiness and government people to explore the idea. Foell budgeted some money to form the club and asked Bob Rick of Gibbs & Soell, Inc., the company's public relations firm, to query industry friends. It "caught on like wildfire", and Jim Lake, Program Specialist of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), drew up a proposal.

What followed in the next 15 months were three proposals, two drafts, hundreds of phone calls and letters, several meetings, speeches and press releases, and the official opening of the Conservation Tillage Information Center on January 2, 1983.

IS IT FEASIBLE?

On October 9, 1981 letters were sent to thirty individuals whose company organizations were known to have interest in conservation tillage. The purpose was to announce a meeting to investigate "the feasibility of a national no-till or reduced tillage association."

The meeting was held October 27 at the Chicago Marriott Hotel. The following people attended:

James E. Lake, National Association of Conservation
Districts
Harold J. Luth, John Deere Plow and Planter Works
Guil Ide, E. I. DuPont de Nemours
Roger Didriksen, Shell Development Chemical Company
Daniel Nelson, Allis-Chalmers
Robert Judd, National Soybean Crop Improvement Council
John Wetton, Farm & Industrial Equipment Institute
Frank Lessiter, No-Till Farmer Magazine
John Fortino, Mobay Chemical Company
Carl Wilson, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Gerald Salzman, International Harvester Company

They explored the idea of forming a national association devoted to furthering the cause of conservation tillage farming. But a prevalent concern was whether the objectives of such an organization could be handled under the auspices of an already existing organization. If a new organization were formed, it

should include people from all facets of agriculture, and tie in the chemical, equipment, seed, etc., industries. Further, the name of the organization should umbrella the diversity of the membership.

Chevron representatives presented four possible objectives of the new association: 1) Further the cause of no-till/conservation-till farming; 2) Open or improve channels of communication among interested public and private organizations and businesses; 3) Provide a structure for educational and promotional programs; and 4) Serve as a focal point, bringing together the different factions of the no-till/conservation-till concept.

The first meeting generated more questions than answers, and a steering committee was formed to pursue objectives prior to a second meeting in December.

It was also suggested that the following organizations and others be invited to participate in further plans: National Farm & Power Equipment Dealers Association, American Seed Trade Association, National Cotton Council, National Wheat Growers Association, American Society of Farm Managers, The Fertilizer Institute, National Fertilizer Solutions Association, Potash and Phosphate Institute, American Soybean Association.

DEFINING OBJECTIVES, DESIGNING A STRUCTURE

The second planning meeting was held December 14, 1981 at

the Chicago Sheraton O'Hare. The prevailing concern of the first meeting was again present: Couldn't the objectives of this proposed organization be met within the framework of an existing organization?

Since October, several companies and associations had expressed this concern to steering committee members. Many felt a new association wasn't necessary but that a central information clearinghouse was. The NACD representative reported a lack of technical understanding about conservation tillage in many geographical areas of the country and a real desire for more and better information at local levels.

After all concerns were aired, representatives for Chevron and Gibbs & Soell presented a "Forum to Advance Conservation Tillage Systems," a coalition of companies and organizations operating as an information clearinghouse.

The NACD offered a similar but more detailed proposal: Establish a National Information Conservation Tillage Center which would function as a special project within the NACD.

Activities would include:

- A consortium of agribusinesses interested in promoting conservation tillage.
- A monthly national newsletter.
- A telephone hotline.
- Assistance in organizing, promoting and conducting conservation tillage workshops.
- Assistance to conservation districts in setting up demonstration projects.

NACD's proposal answered many questions and had considerable

merit. Besides, the NACD had a national delivery system already in place.

A motion was made, seconded and passed that an ad hoc committee be formed to explore the NACD proposal in detail, as well as any other proposals that may be forthcoming.

TESTING THE WATERS

On January 20, 1982 the first news release about plans for a conservation tillage center was sent to all major farm and agribusiness publications to determine the level of interest in agribusiness circles. It generated hundreds of letters and phone calls from farmers, industry people, government people and others involved in one way or another with conservation tillage. Overall the response was positive and supportive with many requests for more information and volunteer offers.

Yet a concern about duplicating efforts was still being expressed, especially by some Cooperative Extension agents and specialists. Dick Foell turned the concern to advantage. In one reply he explained, "We intend to involve Cooperative Extension nationally and state-side up to their necks . . . The fact is the job is too big for any one group, thus there is a real need for a Conservation Tillage Center to coordinate the direction of the multi-facets involved in this dynamic conservation tillage movement."

DOCUMENT & CHARTER FINALIZING A STEERING COMMITTEE

A third meeting was held on March 18 at Iowa State's

Memorial Union in Ames, during the FARM 82 exposition.

The NACD proposal had been reviewed by the ad hoc committee in February. Now it was up to the steering committee members to decide if the NACD actually offered the vehicle for accomplishing the information center's goals.

They agreed the proposal needed more work and should be drafted into the form of a document and charter and voted upon at the next meeting. Gibbs & Soell, Inc. would draft this document and submit it to the committee members by April 1.

The committee also accepted Gibbs & Soell's offer to write to all persons who had attended planning meetings or expressed interest in the project to determine their interest in serving on a finalized steering committee.

THE WORK BEGINS

By April 23, 15 people had volunteered to be part of the steering committee to organize the National Conservation Tillage Information Center. They were:

Joe Antognini, BASF Wyandotte Corporation
Ralph G. Christensen, EPA
Dick Foell, Chevron Chemical Company
John Fortino, Mobay Chemical Company
Arnold D. King, USDA Soil Conservation Service
Jim Lake, National Association of Conservation Districts
Daniel H. Nelson, Allis-Chalmers
Walter Peechatka, Soil Conservation Society of America
Edward E. Puletz, E. I. duPont de Nemours
Skip Ragland, Ciba-Geigy
Duane Sand, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Warren Saufferer, DMI, Inc.
John Soghigian, Dow Chemical Company
K. M. Thurow, International Harvester
John Wetton, Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute

Bob Rice, Gibbs & Soell, was acting secretary.

Their first task was to review and reply to the latest proposal and select a subcommittee on which they would like to serve.

By July 9, eight responses to the proposed organizational structure had been received. They ranged from short go-aheads to thoughtful revisions. Some of the same questions raised at the first meeting last October were still surfacing, in particular, defining the objective "to reduce soil erosion":

-- Joe Antognini, Manager, Market Development for BASF Wyandotte: "To reduce soil erosion -- This must not be the sole purpose or objective. Conservation tillage is to conserve all natural resources plus labor plus dollar inputs and, at the same time, maintain profits for the grower."

-- Duane Sand, Soil Stewardship Consultant, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation: "We should remember that farmers are interested in conserving water, petroleum products, plant nutrients, wildlife, and their own human resources, in addition to conserving their soil."

-- Ralph Christensen, Section Coordinator, EPA: "The purpose of the center should be 'to gather, produce, and disseminate information that will promote the use of conservation methods to reduce soil erosion and to protect the soil and water resources on American farms.'"

INDUSTRY'S OBLIGATIONS

As a result of the January press release and word-of-mouth discussion since, unsolicited letters of support and requests for information continued to arrive.

In an update memo to steering committee members on July 9, Bob Rice wrote that such interest "tells us that the need for a conservation tillage information center is there. Our

challenge is to make it happen."

NACD program specialist Jim Lake was doing just that. On July 27 he submitted a summary for the principal items gleaned from the steering committee members' responses. He had also done some work on a three-year budget and staffing plan.

Now it was industry's turn, as well as other conservation tillage supporters, to give direct signals on what they wanted to do and what activities they would support. Major decisions still pending included:

The purpose of the center: To promote, inform, exchange?

How large would the board be and to what extent would there be farmer and other individual participation?

Administrative responsibility: As a special project within the NACD or as a role of the Board of Directors of the center?

Also pending was a grant from the Joyce Foundation. Prospects were excellent -- if the proposed center's member organizations were able and willing to also commit "earnest money" toward the cause.

FUNDING

An ad hoc meeting of seven members and delegates of the steering committee was held in Washington, D.C. on August 17. NACD reported that the Joyce Foundation had committed to a \$50,000 challenge grant to serve as seed money for the center on the condition that within one year additional

funds can be raised to implement the program.

Funding was one of the most pressing issues, and for the upcoming meeting in Iowa the committee requested each steering committee member be prepared to "state whether your company or organization can or cannot (will or will not) contribute financially at the suggested level." The suggested annual contribution was \$15 for individual membership, \$100 for non-profit organizations and between \$250 and \$5,000 for corporate membership based on annual sales.

A fourth draft proposal for a National Conservation Tillage Information Center was sent to steering committee members on September 7, 1982. It was intended this document would be adopted, with any additional changes, as the organization's charter at next week's meeting in Iowa.

CTIC IS CHARTERED

September 16-17 the National Custom Applicator's Exposition was occurring at Stockton, Iowa. Steering committee members had met in nearby Davenport.

The outcome of their meeting was the establishment of the Conservation Tillage Information Center, "a clearinghouse for information on conservation tillage, performing both information gathering and dissemination."

With minor changes, draft number two of the third proposal was adopted. A first year operating budget was also approved. Industry, government and NACD contributions,

in addition to the Joyce grant would fund the new organization whose first year costs were budgeted to exceed \$250,000.

Among the organizations that pledged support and had provided time, money or manpower toward the effort were agricultural, chemical and machinery companies, other agribusinesses, the Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Soil Conservation Society of America, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the USDA Soil Conservation Service, the USDA Cooperative Extension Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Competing companies, business and government had pulled together in the interest of conservation tillage and the farmer's plight in conserving soil, water, labor, energy and capital. Together they had built a clearinghouse where each could exchange information and develop conservation tillage systems.

Specifically, this clearinghouse provides the following informational services:

- Status surveys of the 3,000 soil and water conservation districts.
- Inventory of research currently underway on conservation systems.
- Reference people, university and USDA specialists, chemical, equipment, fertilizer and seed representatives, and conservation district officials.
- Field information gathered from demonstration projects.
- Educational and technical materials.

- Monthly newsletter.
- Conservation tillage hotline.
- Speakers Bureau.

FARM PRESS AND FARM BROADCAST

On the morning of October 26, 1982 Dick Foell, chairman of the new center's executive committee, made the first public announcement of the Conservation Tillage Information Center. Speaking before the American Agricultural Editors' Association at the annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, Foell complimented a form of stewardship the founding company representatives had shown in working together to further the cause of conservation tillage.

On October 29, 1982 a press release was sent to 386 farm publications, 79 newspaper farm reporters and the wire services. The Conservation Tillage Information Center (CTIC) would begin operations in January.

A second public announcement was made and news release distributed at the National Association of Farm Broadcasters' annual meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, November 13, 1982.

The opening of the Conservation Tillage Information Center received excellent coverage by print and broadcast media. CTIC was now a functioning entity. Start-up activities began January 2, 1983.