

RESIDUE MANAGEMENT IN 2017

AGRONOMY UPDATE JANUARY 2017



So how much of an issue is residue management going to be next spring? In many cases there is still at least a portion of the crop still in the field. There is crop still in the swath and crop that was left standing and was partially (or completely) flattened by snow. In addition, there was also a lot of crop taken off in less than ideal conditions and the straw may not have been chopped and spread as well as

many would have liked to see.

Let's take these issues one at a time. First is the quality of the spreading and chopping done by the combines in less than ideal conditions this fall.

While the quality of the job done may not have been as good as what would happen under dry conditions, the straw left behind will be rotten and will break up easily in the spring with either vertical tillage or a heavy harrow; provided the straw gets a chance to dry up. If the straw stays wet, vertical tillage may do a better job than the heavy harrow.

Secondly, what about the residue that will be left behind when crops that have spent the winter in a swath are run through the combine?





Again, there is every chance that the straw in these swaths will be quite rotten by the time they are dry enough to put through a combine. I really don't anticipate there being any unusual issues with the residue from swaths.

This brings me to the final scenario and the one that may be a problem in the spring. Crops that were left standing and then went to the ground under the weight of the snow will likely cause a couple of issues in the spring.

The first problem is that in most fields there will be a certain percentage of the heads that are lying on the ground that will germinate and put roots down before a combine can get there in the spring. That will add to the already considerable problems that are going to be encountered picking up the crop, even with a flex header. This leads directly to the second problem, which is that the combining process will leave a lot of long stalks still attached to the ground, either by the roots, the head or by both.

In cases like this, a heavy harrow would not likely be the best option. It will tend to pull up and drag the straw, or have the plants just slide through between the tines. For those who have one, a vertical tillage unit will likely be the preferred option. One note of caution – under the conditions we are looking at next spring, I suspect chopping and sizing the straw on the ground will be critical. It may be advisable to set the machine so there is not too much angle on the disks. You will want to penetrate the soil and cut the straw. If there is too much dirt being thrown, you may simply roll over the straw without chopping it up enough, and bury it under a layer of dirt, right into what is going to be your seed bed.

Vertical tillage could very likely end up being an important part of field preparation for many of you in the

coming spring. With that in mind, it's important to remember exactly what job you want to accomplish out there. Setting the machine to give it the best chance of chopping and sizing residue rather than burying it, may end up making a huge difference in how happy you are with the seed bed preparation when it's time to pull in with the drill.

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