

Besides the Extra Dollars You're Already Earning From No-Till, This Climate-Friendly Practice Is Adding Another \$112 Per Acre in Environmental Value for the Non-Farm Public



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While many of our readers certainly recognize the positive impact no-till has on their farm's profitability, most haven't recognized the environmentally-friendly value it also brings to America's non-farm population. By combining the extra cropping value enjoyed by growers with the climate-friendly environmental benefits of this practice, it's apparent to me that we've been underselling the overall worth of no-till.

Over the years, growers have told the *No-Till Farmer* staff that they've pocketed anywhere from an extra \$25-90 per acre by switching to no-till. The typical no-till savings include less machinery investment, reduced input costs, fewer trips across the field, less labor needs, better water usage, lower nutrient needs and the ability to farm more acres.

Since the extra value differs among farms and fields, we're taking a conservative approach by settling on an extra return of \$30 per acre as an across-the-board average for calculating the overall benefits of no-tilling in this article.

Based on a recent economic analysis by the Rural Investment to Protect Our Environment (RIPE) group, here's a rundown on the value this farmer-led, non-profit organization places on five key environmental benefits that occur with no-tilled soybeans:

Environmental Benefits	Per Acre Value
Carbon sequestration	\$ 7
Soil health	\$ 16
Air quality and health benefits	\$ 20
Water quality	\$ 25
Soil nutrients	\$ 44
Total	\$112

By adding a conservative \$30 per acre earned by growers, the overall no-till benefit grows to \$142 per acre.

By seeding cover crops after corn harvest, they estimated an overall environmental value of \$102 per acre. With savings of \$15 per acre due to reduced fertilizer and pesticide purchases alone, adding these figures with the environmental benefits brings the overall value to \$117 per acre.

More Dollars for No-Till

An independent farmer-led non-profit group, RIPE is proposing a program that will fully cover the cropping costs of protecting the environment for the general public. This is in contrast to the cost-saving concept used with current Farm Bill conservation programs.

"We will focus on the public environmental benefits, along with farmer benefits," says Aliza Wasserman-Drewes, director of the group. "We want to demonstrate the value of these practices to the public. This program won't restrict the use of government ag cost-share programs and is designed to make sure future governmental climate policies won't hamper farmer profitability."

Adoption of the group's climate policy would guarantee a fair return to farmers for their voluntary investments in practices that deliver public benefits for climate mitigation, clean water, healthy soil and other environmental services.

With the adoption of no-till, strip-till, cover crops or other environmentally-friendly conservation practices, the program would compensate growers up to \$100 an acre each year.

These would include practices that improve soil health, lead to cleaner water, reduce climate change, reduce flood damage, add biodiversity, improve pollination, sequester carbon and reduce crop water needs.

"We also believe growers currently no-tilling and seeding cover crops should be compensated for already using these practices," says Wasserman-Drewes. "We don't want to lock early adopters of no-till, strip-till and cover crops out of our program."

Wanted: 8% of Climate Funding

With President Biden's proposed \$500 billion in climate funding, the group would like to see 8% of these dollars be used to compensate farmers for adopting various environmental protection practices. With contributions from the president's proposed sweeping climate change policies, phase one of the program could allow one-third of U.S. ag producers to enroll up to 100 acres with a maximum annual payment of \$10,000 per grower. After the full program is launched, there would be no limits on the enrolled acreage.

Hopefully, you've recognized the favorable overall value no-till and cover crops are already having on this nation's environment. With this information, there's no excuse for underselling the many merits of no-tilling and seeding cover crops to the general public — practices that have already proven extremely successful on many farms across America. 🌻

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