



Newspaper/Magazine: FINANCIAL EXP.

Date: 26/12/2005

Place of Publication : Delhi Chandigarh Bangalore Meerut Jaipur Faridabad Mumbai

Zero tillage yields rich pickings

Ashok B Sharma

Karnal, Dec 25

Intensive mining of soil, which was initiated during the days of the Green Revolution, is now being gradually replaced by the concept of zero or minimum tillage. This awakening is capturing the minds of farmers in Haryana, Punjab and other parts of north India.

In Haryana, since 1996 nearly one million hectare of land has been covered under the conservation technologies like zero tillage and permanent raised beds. Punjab had also introduced these technologies since the 2002 *rabi* (winter), but the area covered remains less than in Haryana.

This concept is, however, not new. Farmers say that in the days before the Green Revolution, a number of low cost eco-

According to Dharam Veer, a farmer in Daini Khurd in Karnal, the conservation techniques also pushed up yields. "Seven of my nine acres are under zero tillage, and my produce has already gone up by one quintal," he says

friendly conservation agriculture techniques were practised. The old concept is now brought

back by the use of new machines at the initiative of the Rice-Wheat Consortium for the Indo-Gangetic plains.

RWC is an inter-governmental agency involving India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh with the global body for wheat and maize research, CIMMYT, as the nodal agency. The programme also involves inter-cropping in wheat and rice to encourage diversification in the Gangetic belt. IRRI and Icrisat are the other partner institutions. The Asian Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery (APCAEM) is also promoting the development of new machines.

Farmers have benefited in the process of adopting the zero tillage technology with an average saving of Rs 2,000 per acre on costs for labour and inputs.

According to Sahib Singh,

who farms nine acre of land in Karnal district, the conservation technologies help him save about Rs 1,500-2,000 per acre on labour and input costs. "I don't till the soil any more, and save 10% on water use," he says. "I use a drill machine to sow seeds, but the machine is expensive, even though the state government gives a 25% subsidy, amounting to Rs 3,200, on the Rs 18,000 price."

The other problem related to zero-tillage was the proliferation of weeds in rice fields, says Samar Singh, a CIMMYT scientist now working in the RWC programme. "So we have advised farmers to grow *sesbenia* (*dhainche*) along with rice, as it discourages weeds. After 30 days, the *sesbenia* should be destroyed by spraying 24D."