

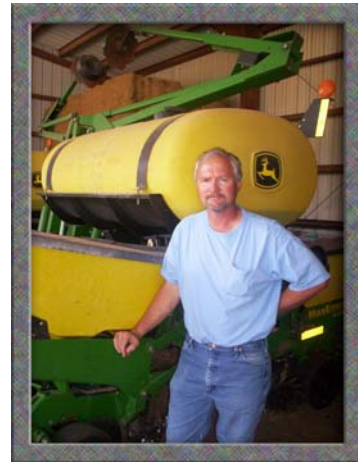


## Alan Mindemann, Apache, OK Farmer who uses no-till

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APACHE, Ok.--No-till farming is the cultural practice of the future for dryland farmers in the Rolling Plains of North Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, most agronomic scientists and knowledgeable agriculturists believe.

Alan Mindemann, Apache, Ok. farmer, believes this is true. He has bet his entire family farming operation on no-till. He has not owned a piece of tillage equipment, a plow, if you will, for more than 10 years now.



No-till, however, is not a magic pill for what ails a family farm, Mindemann will tell you. "You can get into trouble using no-till practices a lot quicker than if you are using conventional tillage," he said.

"To get ready to no-till your farm," he said, "you have to change your mindset. What worked in the past won't work now. You must think about soil differently. With no-till, crops grow differently and moisture gets into the soil differently." Improvements in soil fertility and pH will begin to show up in two or three years, he says. In 10 years, Mindemann says, a farmer will be amazed by the difference in a field's productivity.

Mindemann not only is a seasoned practitioner of no-till, he helps other farmers with the practice in several different ways. He works as a consultant to several farmers and he speaks on no-till farming at agronomic meetings and seminars.

He is a certified crop advisor. After taking classes at Oklahoma State University and being tested, he received his certification from the American Society of Agronomy. To keep his certification, he takes 20 hours of continuous education every year.

Mindemann inherited a dryland family farm from his father, who, typically, had been a conventional tillage farmer for many years. Mindemann had always been interested in no-till, believing it to be the way to go.

"I bought a no-till drill for wheat and I rented the other no-till equipment I needed to cut down on costs," he said. "That was the only way I could afford to get started. I started small, getting one or two fields at a time ready for no-till. This has to be done a year in advance of beginning to no-till. You have to get the fertility up and fix the soil pH. And you have to get the soil surface covered with residue."

Along with getting the farm fields ready for no-till, Mindemann believed the new cultural practice would allow him to change from the continuous wheat culture the farm been in. He started growing cotton, corn and milo, crops dryland farmers had believed for years couldn't be grown in southwest Oklahoma.

"With no-till, we can grow good dryland cotton," Mindemann said, "not the half-bale to the acre stuff we used to grow, but the two bales to the acre we grow now." Along with no-till, Mindemann says a farmer also needs to follow a good insect pest management program. Under IPM, he says, you only spray for insects when you have to and then you use the correct chemical for the job.

"A good IPM program is necessary," he says, "either you have to hire a competent consultant or learn how to do it yourself."

This year, with a serious drought facing him, Mindemann already has his fields ready for spring planting. He has had two burndown applications on his fields, using glyphosate (Roundup) and possibly some 2,4D to kill volunteer weeds or cheat and to clean up wheat fields.

His fertilizer has been applied to the fields and he is waiting on a rain to bring what he needs, an inch of rain to plant. Mindemann intends to plant 950 acres of cotton. If drought conditions persist, he says, he will adjust and only plant cotton in the fields with the best fertility and plant residue to hold moisture.

"We can't afford to dust in \$45 an acre seed," he says. "While we usually plant in May, we may have to plant in late June and not plant as many acres."

Mindemann plants picker cotton varieties such as Fibermax 960 and 9063 that are Roundup Ready and have BollGard, the bt gene that combats bollworms. "We use picker cotton because it grades better than stripper cotton and grades relate to money."

"I am the fourth generation to farm this place," he says. "My son will be the first generation to have a better, more productive farm. I am the one who is going to turn it around. If I'm not known for anything else, that is what I want to be known for."

