

## Talkin Cotton

by Vic Schoonover

### Oklahoma Cotton Council



Roger Fischer, Tillman County farmer, kneels in the stubble of no till wheat harvested last year. In the background behind him is a field of wheat waiting to be harvested also planted no till. (NTOK Cotton photo)



Tillman County farmer Roger Fischer uses his index finger to point out the loosness of soil in a no till wheat stubble field harvested in the spring of 2010. Even with the extreme dry weather southwest Oklahoma farmers have been experiencing for the past year, the soil still is loose and ready for planting. (NTOK Cotton photo)



A lone tree stands in a waterway recently dozed into the soil of a farm operated by the Williams and Fischer farm families in Tillman County. Behind the waterway can be seen a crop of no till winter wheat ready to be harvested, even though it only received one and two-tenth inches of rain since October, 2010. (NTOK Cotton photo)

Chattanooga, Ok.-His frown shadowed by the bill of his cap, the tall Tillman County farmer studied the wide scar of bulldozed soil extending across the farm field. Dry weather is what is causing the frown on Roger Fischer's face. Such soil conservation work as the three-acre waterway he is looking at has been slowed due to the current drought.

"We would have sprigged in bermuda grass by now to cover this new waterway," Fischer said, "but it would be futile to plant it with no soil moisture to get it started."

The farm where the conservation work is progressing belongs to Fischer's wife's family where they settled in 1932, Fischer said. In cooperation with his brother-in-law, Gary Williams, and the late Doyle Williams, his father-in-law, Fischer continues to make the 240 acre farm more productive. Completion of this waterway will finish up a mile of waterways on the farm, Fischer said. "There are 29 terraces on this farm," he said.

West boundary of the farm is less than one quarter mile from the Deep Red Creek, part of the Deep Red Watershed in Tillman County.

Fischer explained the importance of soil conservation work on this particular farm:

"Due to the way the land rolls on this farm," Fischer said, "it would be impossible to productively farm it without the conservation work we have done to hold the soil and prevent erosion."

He points out the stubble cover left from a field of no till wheat was planted last year. On the other side of the new waterway, a current crop of winter wheat waves in the wind. This wheat, Fischer explained, even with the limitations of the current drought, is too good to "insure out." Estimating the field should yield 10 to 15 bushels of wheat this year, Fischer remembers one inch of rain fell on the field Oct. 26, 2010, shortly after the seed emerged from the soil after planting. The only other moisture the dryland crop has received since then is two-tenths of an inch early in March. "The difference here has been our soil conservation work plus no till planting where soil moisture is better retained in the field and there is less rain water runoff in the ditches."

While conservation work on the 240 acre Tillman County farm was done privately by members of the Fischer and Williams families, Fischer said, he has participated in many shared-expense conservation projects with the National Resources Conservation Service.

Fischer is a member of the Oklahoma Cotton Council board of directors, an organization working with the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts to sponsor Stewardship Week where land owners work together to protect and conserve natural resources.

"The Oklahoma Cotton Council is excited to be able to partner with the OACD to emphasize Stewardship Week here in Oklahoma," said Harvey Schroeder, OCC executive director. "The Native American proverb points us in the right direction when it says, 'We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it for our children.' The responsibility for stewardship rests squarely on our shoulders."

"Stewardship Week is a time when we recognize the hard work of agricultural producers and other landowners do to conserve our soil, water, air, wildlife habitats and other natural resources," said Joe Parker, OACD president.