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## Planetary Wellbeing

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## Fight Climate Change with No Till Farming Foods

If you're looking for ways to bring more sustainable foods into your daily diet, then you'll want to check out no till farming (sometimes called conservation tillage or zero tillage farming). This old-world technique is gaining new popularity as one of the many revolutionary sustainable farming practices used today. As you'll soon discover, not only does no-till farming fight climate change, it benefits farmers, protects water, air, and much more.

### Quick Guide: Basics of No Till Agriculture

- **What is no till farming?** No till farming avoids the use of mechanical tilling via giant farming vehicles. Instead, seeds are deposited directly onto un-tilled soil that still contains residues from the previous crop using special equipment, including discs and tine coulters.<sup>[i]</sup> Cover crops are used to boost soil nutrients and preventing soil erosion.
- **No till farming fights climate change:** Conservation tillage practices increase the level of organic carbon stored in the soil, which reduces the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. No till farming systems further reduce climate impact by reducing their tractor fuel requirements.<sup>[ii]</sup>
- **Conservation tillage and biodiversity:** No till farming helps to prevent soil compaction and which ultimately protects the biodiversity of the soil, so these crops require less weed and disease control, making organic agriculture practices more feasible on these fields.<sup>[iii]</sup>
- **Popularity of conservation tillage:** The number of farmers who are using conservation tillage methods is increasing. There are now about 51 million acres of US cropland where no till agriculture is applied.<sup>[iv]</sup>

### Take Action! Promote Sustainable Farming Practices

1. **Buy eco-friendly food like no-till produce:** The fact that there are no [organic food labels](#) to identify no-till foods can make it difficult to find actual food brands that promote no till farming. However, there are several ways to recognize foods grown using this sustainable technique.

First, search the Rodale Institute's [Farm Locator](#) to find sustainable farmers practicing conservation tillage in your area.

Second, if you can't find any that specifically practice no-till methods, you will likely find no-till farmers at the local farmers market. In order to know which ones are legitimate, [study the basics of no-till or conservation tillage](#) farming so that you can ask vendors at the local farmers market about their agricultural methods.

Third, check the [No-Till Farmer Innovator Awards](#) list to see if there are farmers in your area who have been winners.<sup>[v]</sup> Just be sure that the farmer uses both no-till and organic techniques to really make your food choice sustainable.



2. **Garden using no till methods:** The concept of no till farming for bigger agricultural plots can also apply to small-scale gardens in homes. There is a wide selection of no till equipment especially created for hobby farmer – ask your local greenhouse for options such as discs, chisel plows, and small-scale cultipackers. Check out suppliers like [Kunz](#) which carries made in the USA options.

3. **Tell your elected officials you want to support no-till farmers:** Today, there are some states that provide no-till farmers with financing options to help them start conservation tilling. One such program is through the [National Council of State Agricultural Finance Programs](#) which features conservation tilling loans. In South Dakota, for instance, a no till farmer can borrow as much as \$30,000 to pay for equipment no till and grass seeding equipment.<sup>[vi]</sup> However, not all states offer such programs – if yours doesn't, tell your representatives you want them to offer such loans to local farmers by making phone calls and writing letters or emails.

4. **More government policies to promote no till farming:** There are plenty of actions that the government can undertake in order to promote no till farming. They can give incentives to farmers especially if these farmers have agricultural land that would benefit largely from conservation tilling. In Australia, no till farmers are given a refundable tax offset equivalent to 15% of the cost of an eligible no till seeder.<sup>[vii]</sup> This is something the US government can adopt. The government can also fund

additional research on how to adopt conservation tillage practices to organic farms so that farmers and the environment can reap the benefits of both types of farming.

## Dig Deeper: Sustainable Food Systems

- Read about the [Top 10 Conservation Tillage Benefits](#).
- Learn more about innovations in no-till farming by watching these [No-Till Videos](#).
- Visit the National Council of State Agricultural Finance Programs for a directory of [conservation tilling loan programs per state](#).
- Get more data on [Community Supported Agriculture](#) from the US Department of Agriculture.
- Learn more about [public policy and conservation agriculture](#).
- Find out how no tillage farming prevents soil erosion, reduces air pollution, improves quality of surface water (by producing less soil runoff), and reduces irrigation requirements via [Why no-tillage?](#).

Images by [nracs.arizona](#)

[i] Why no-tillage? . (n.d.). In *Rolf-Derpsch*. Retrieved September 2, 2012, from <http://www.rolf-derpsch.com/notill.htm>

[ii] Baldwin, K. (n.d.). Conservation tillage on organic farms. In *Center for Environmental Farming Systems*. Retrieved September 2, 2012, from <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/organicproductionguide/tillagefinaljan2009.pdf>

[iii] *Steps To Increase Farm Biodiversity*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 3, 2012, from No-Till Farmer: <http://www.no-tillfarmer.com/pages/News—Steps-To-Increase-Farm-Biodiversity.php>

[iv](Conservation Tillage on Organic Farms)

[v] No-Till Farmer Magazine. (2012, June 18). Syngenta, No-Till Farmer seek nominations for 2012 no-till innovator awards. In *No-Till Farmer Magazine*. Retrieved September 3, 2012, from <http://www.no-tillfarmer.com/pages/No-Till-Innovators.php>

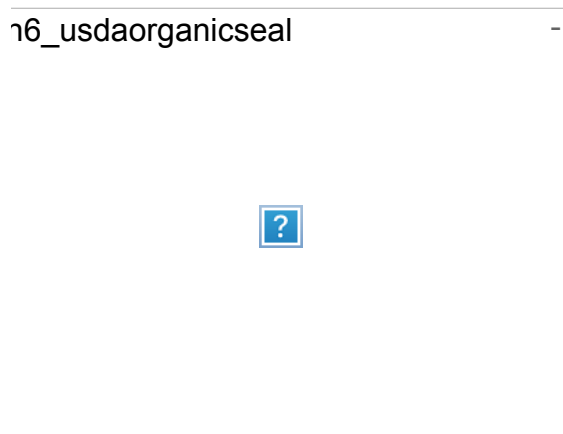
[vi] South Dakota state agricultural finance programs. (n.d.). In *State AG Finance*. Retrieved September 3, 2012, from <http://www.stateagfinance.org/southdakota.html>

[vii] Conservation tillage refundable tax offset. (n.d.). In *Australian Taxation Office*. Retrieved September 3, 2012, from <http://www.ato.gov.au/businesses/content.aspx?doc=/content/00308872.htm>

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