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Gypsum may be used as soil amendment to no-tilled soil to reduce runoff volume and improve water quality related to nutrient runoff, particularly where manure has been surface applied.

On the Cover
Tree reflections.
Photo by C. Haggerty.





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Readers' forum

Organic farming and conservation cannot coexist

Many in the scientific community are blanching at the obvious lack of science shown by John R. Teasdale in "Strategies for soil conservation in no-tillage and organic farming systems" (November/December 2007 issue). His research was designed to show that organic farming systems increase soil carbon more than no-tillage farming systems.

This was not a comparison between the two systems and the impact on soil carbon because organic farming requires extensive tillage, which destroys soil organic matter comprised of 50% carbon. In order to counteract the negative effect of the excessive tillage necessary in organic farming, Teasdale "imported high levels of manure biomass." The no-tillage system received none!

Organic farming is farming without pesticides, commercial fertilizer, and modern plant breeding techniques designed to increase production and improve the environment. Organic has nothing to do with manure. The addition of manure makes any system more sustainable, but this article implies that manure is unique to organic farming, which is untrue.

By itself, organic farming is completely unsustainable, and the extensive tillage required by organic farming makes it an environmental disaster. Widespread adoption of organic farming would result in worldwide starvation. Organic farming and conservation cannot coexist!

Jerry Crew
Webb, Iowa

Response

The primary principle of organic farming is to improve soils first through additions of organic-based materials and diversified rotations and that creation of fertile, biologically-active soils will provide the foundation for crop management. Tillage is not the defining feature of organic agriculture; it is a tool that can be used judiciously to aid in managing organic materials and unwanted vegetation but, given a well-planned rotation, can be minimized to avoid excess destruction of soil organic matter. I believe no-tillage farmers and organic farmers share many of the same goals for improving soil. Both approaches can provide insights into improved sustainable practices, and there is more to be gained from working toward this common end than from divisive criticism.

John R. Teasdale
Sustainable Agricultural Systems Lab
USDA Agricultural Research Service

Note on Upcoming CEAP Special Issue

The November/December 2008 issue (Volume 63, Number 6) of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* will be a special issue on the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP).

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