

America The Bountiful

Harvest Tips Can Be A Hedge Against Drought Conditions

(NAPSA)—No one has suffered more from current drought conditions than the nation's farmers, but there are measures that farmers can take at harvest to maximize moisture and minimize the chronic shortage of rainfall.

Implementing conservation tillage practices gives farmers the best opportunity to retain soil moisture by leaving a protective blanket of crop residue (leaves, stems and stalks) from harvest on the soil surface. This blanket shields the soil surface from heat, keeps soils cooler and reduces moisture losses by evaporation.

The Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) at Purdue University has this advice for farmers who are coping with drought conditions:

- Harvest crops higher if possible, leaving corn, milo and wheat stalks standing to better trap snow during the winter.

- Don't burn crop residue. The mulch reduces water evaporation and lowers soil temperatures.

- Avoid using tillage equipment. Depending on soil type and texture, a tillage trip may evaporate up to ½ inch of water from the soil. Crop residue also prevents run-off of water after heavy rains.

- Rethink crop rotations. Match the crop to be planted next year with moisture available in the soil profile. If moisture is short, select a crop that doesn't require large amounts of water.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recommends that farmers maintain as much ground cover as possible to



Leaving crop residue on the soil surface after harvest helps conserve valuable soil moisture for next year's crops.

protect soil and lessen or prevent excessive soil erosion. "Producers are encouraged to delay, reduce or eliminate tillage operations in both the fall and the spring," says NRCS Agronomist Jeff Hemenway. "Fields should not be worked to accomplish weed control."

Dr. Bruno Alesii, manager of technology development for Monsanto, advises using burndown herbicide applications to eliminate weeds or unwanted vegetation, because weeds consume valuable moisture. "Instead of tillage, make a fall and/or spring application of Roundup® agricultural herbicide to eliminate weeds," Alesii advises.

Additional drought preparation materials are available at www.drought.unl.edu or www.nrcs.usda.gov. For more information on conservation tillage, visit the CTIC Web site at www.ctic.purdue.edu. Farmers are also encouraged to check with their Extension office for further information.