

## No-tillers: Do You Want Your Combine to Cut or Chop the Stalks/Stubble?



Has been seeded.



Yes, it's harvested!

by Matt Hagny

Since many farmers in the US & Canada are contemplating equipment trades or purchases at this time of year, I'd like to weigh in with a few thoughts on harvesting equipment.

Chopping corn heads have become very popular lately. The idea is to cut and shred more of the corn stalk--but this is mostly a concept for tillage (or for seeding with shank openers or other designs that lack good residue flow). The more the stalk is pulverized, the faster it decomposes, true.

But should no-tillers buy into (literally) this concept? First, do you really want your mulch to decompose faster? Maybe in the northern Corn Belt or under irrigation, but otherwise, probably not. Second, do you really want all those stalks lying on the soil surface, where they will keep the soil wet underneath when you want it to dry out enough to plant? And create a dense layer of mulch that must either be moved aside with row cleaners, or cut by the opener blades? Or would you rather have the stalks standing, where the planter or drill can simply lay them down as it goes along, thus avoiding the need to cut them? --Generally, the latter is much better for no-tillers.

For these reasons, many progressive no-tillers not only shun chopping corn heads, but are actually buying standard corn heads with the least-aggressive snapping rolls--fluted, not knife-rolls. If buying used, these actually sell at a discount, so it's a win/win situation. If you are ordering a new corn head, go with the fluted rolls. Or if you are replacing snap-rolls, go with fluted.

Another aspect that helps reduce the destruction of stalks is to tilt the corn head, which can be done with certain adaptors. And then drive faster (some will harvest 150 bu/a corn at 7 - 8 mph in largish, level fields), and with the snap-roll speed set a bit on the slow side. Ideally, you will get the entire stalk thru the head nearly intact, perhaps even with the husks and ear shank still attached (see photo). In total, you will burn less diesel per bushel harvested, plus making your planting of the next crop easier.

Stripper heads instead of sickles for small grain harvest offer similar advantages. You get more bushels harvested per day with less fuel burned, can start an hour earlier and run an hour later each day, can run a far smaller combine, and it is dramatically easier to seed the next crop (so long as you get this done before the stripper stubble rots off at the soil line and starts to drift into piles).

***We at Exapta hope you had a great year, and can now set the stage for even better results in the future!***