

Do GMOs promote soil conservation?

(Summary)

On America's farms, it's unclear to what extent herbicide-tolerant crops have helped farmers reduce tillage, writes Nathanael Johnson in his new post on the GMO debate. Tilling can be destructive to the soil's ecosystems, and Monsanto's Round-up Ready crops were supposed to combat this issue by allowing farmers to kill weeds via herbicides rather than tilling. Some farmers had already moved to conservation tilling, a practice that reduces the amount of soil turnover, before GM crops became popular. But some farmers do agree that herbicide-tolerant crops have helped them to reduce the amount of tilling they do on their fields. However, the issue is still hotly debated.

"I've looked really closely at the whole no-till thing, and that's just a fallacy," said Bill Freese of the Center for Food Safety. Conservation tillage hasn't been helped much by genetic engineering, and it's actually on the decline, he said.

Pro-GE people tend to say just the opposite: According to them, conservation tillage is going up, up, up. The reason this discrepancy exists is that we haven't had any good data for nearly a decade. That's because, thanks to budget cutbacks, the USDA stopped paying to collect this information. So everything since 2004 is based on estimates, projections, and anecdotes. Craig Cox of the Environmental Working Group says that everyone he's talked to says there's been a decline in conservation tillage as farmers rush to cash in on high corn prices.

Read the full, original story here: ["Soil proprietor: Do GMOs promote dirt conservation?"](#)

Additional Resources:

- ["Roundup-ready, aim, spray: How GM crops lead to herbicide addiction,"](#) Grist