

Planning, Coordination and Implementation of  
The University of Tennessee's  
Milan No-Till Field Day

Research Center Administrator's Society  
2011 Winter Meeting  
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The University of Tennessee's Milan No-Till Field Day (MNTFD) has been held since 1981 and is recognized as the nation's largest field day dedicated to no-tillage crop production. The purposes of this presentation are to describe some of the history of the MNTFD, share some of the successes of MNTFD and to present some insights into the planning and implementation required to host a large-scale field day.

MNTFD was first held in 1981 and was the brainchild of the late Tom McCutchen, the first superintendent of the "UT Milan Experiment Station", now known as the AgResearch & Education Center at Milan. Tom is known as "The Father of Tennessee No-Till", and it was a direct result of his efforts that no-tillage agriculture was developed in Tennessee. He was the driving force behind a team of research and extension personnel who worked to overcome the obstacles related to no-till. Through their efforts, soil erosion was significantly reduced in west Tennessee, which had the highest rates of soil erosion in the U.S. prior to the adoption of no-till.

In an effort to share the knowledge gained through research efforts about no-till, the first MNTFD was held in 1981. More than 1700 visitors attended, which exceeded all expectations, but confirmed the demand for information about this new system of farming. As a result of this early success, the field day was scheduled again in 1982. The attendance increased to over 2000 and the field day has been held continuously since that time. MNTFD was an annual event from 1981-2002, but has since been held biennially in even-numbered years. During the past 30 years we have had field day visitors from 37 states, numerous international countries, and total attendance has been 124,291. We are often asked why MNTFD has been so very successful. Our belief is that we had a tremendous problem with soil erosion, and our personnel developed an effective, efficient remedy that farmers wanted to know about.

**SCOPE** - Initially the scope of MNTFD was related to how to make a no-till system work, i.e. how do you make a planter work in un-tilled ground, how do you control weeds when tillage is no longer an option, and will this impact my yields? Since that time the scope has expanded to include the transfer of information about many new technologies and how they can be incorporated into a no-till system. Current MNTFD programs include topics such as GMO's, Precision Ag, Weed Resistance, as well as other related issues, including but not limited to, Bioenergy, Marketing, Beef Cattle Production, Estate Planning, Irrigation, and Forestry and Wildlife topics.

**PLANNING** - Planning of the MNTFD begins the day after the event. A post-MNTFD meeting is held to discuss the event and document things that worked well and more importantly, things that could be improved upon. MNTFD is always held the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in July, but the actual planning of the event begins the previous November when announcements are sent to media to place MNTFD on their calendars of events. In January exhibitors are mailed entry forms and a slide with the date of the event is also sent to Extension specialists for use in their winter meetings. The program planning begins in February with the goal of getting the program finalized by the end of March, prior to planting. This is necessary because some tour stops will need to be placed near their respective field research plots. Once the program is in place, our Communications staff will begin preparing press releases for the media with information on specific tours. In June, all speakers are asked to submit a written abstract of their presentations. These are compiled into a MNTFD Tour Report that is published on our website and is available for downloading. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in July (in even-numbered years) the MNTFD is held, and a wrap-up meeting with the REC-Milan staff follows during the first week in August.

**COMPONENTS** - The MNTFD includes field tours, indoor seminars, a trade show with commercial and educational exhibits, a VIP Breakfast for supporters and elected officials, VIP Tours of the AgResearch & Education Center at Milan for VIP's and field day attendees, and several community events are held the week of MNTFD. Community events include a Cotton Fashion Show, Antique Tractor Show, Beauty Pageants, Golf Tournament, and Stock Car Races.

**PUBLICITY** - MNTFD is publicized in many ways. Press releases are provided to agricultural publications such as Mid-America FarmerGrower, and Delta Farm Press. Local newspapers, radio, and television are contacted and interviews are scheduled. MNTFD bumper stickers are provided to faculty and staff, and posters are sent to Co-ops and farm supply outlets.

**EXHIBIT TENTS** - Commercial and educational displays are hosted in the exhibit area. Exhibitors can choose from areas under tents with adjacent outside display areas, or outside display areas. In order to select the appropriate size and type of display area, entry forms are sent to exhibitors. Exhibitors are charged for display space.

**TENTS** - A total of 33 tents were erected ranging in size from 15' x 15' up to 60' x 150' for the 2010 MNTFD. Tents are utilized for many functions including research tours, exhibit space, VIP Breakfast, food vendors, etc.

**VIP BREAKFAST** - For many years, a VIP Breakfast has been held to recognize supporters and elected officials. The VIP Breakfast is by invitation only. Attendees park off-site and are transported to the MNTFD site on a charter bus and vans. A full buffet breakfast is served followed by a short program. Each attendee receives a MNTFD cap, and they are offered a 20 minute VIP Tour of the research center. Attendees are shuttled back to the main exhibit area where they may take in other aspects of MNTFD. We receive some financial support from Syngenta Crop Protection to support the breakfast.

**RESEARCH TOURS** - The primary function of MNTFD is the research tours. MNTFD usually has 13-19 research tours. Tours consist of 3-4 presentations and 2 speakers are available for each presentation. The 2010 MNTFD program included 47 research presentations involving 80 presenters. Tours are located across the entire North Tract of the research center. Tour attendees are transported to outlying tours on tour trailers or rented school buses. Walking tours are available around the perimeter of the exhibit area. Seminars are also held in the conference room of the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum located onsite.

**PERSONNEL** - MNTFD requires a large number of personnel. Over 240 personnel were required for the 2010 MNTFD. Each activity/function has a “point person” responsible for providing leadership to that particular function. Various assignments include:

Tour Presenters	Public Address Announcer
Tour Guides	Parking/Counting crew
Tour Coordinators	Ag Museum
Tractor Drivers	Registration
Bus Drivers	EMT/Paramedics
Maintenance	Electricians
Water	Exhibit Coordinator
Trash	Equipment Loading
Exhibitor Shuttle	Cap Sales

**FOOD** - Two food vendors are allowed to sell food to field day attendees. UT provides food for the VIP Breakfast, worker’s breakfasts, worker’s lunches, and the Cotton Fashion Show. The lead person for each individual worker group is responsible for picking up box lunches for their groups. Lunches are delivered to all personnel working on any part of a tour (speakers, drivers, guides, coordinators, etc.).

**REHEARSAL RUN** - A rehearsal run is conducted on the afternoon prior to MNTFD. At this time, all workers are expected to attend, pick up their MNTFD cap, and make sure that they know their assignment. All are instructed to know where each activity will be occurring. Safety is discussed and instructions are given regarding how we will react in the event of a weather emergency. All tours are conducted and speakers are critiqued by a Dean, Department Head, or REC Director. VIP Tours are rehearsed so drivers and tour guides are familiar with REC-Milan. This requires a commitment of time and effort by all who are involved, but we believe it is essential for an event of this scale.

**MISCELLANEOUS ASSIGNMENTS** - Mobile radios are assigned to all REC-Milan staff, all “point people” and various other essential personnel. Communication is available to EMT’s in the event of an emergency. This required a total of 39 radios in 2010. Approximately 18 all terrain vehicles were in use during the 2010 MNTFD including John Deere Gators, Kawasaki Mules, as well as several golf carts. These are utilized by some of the REC-Milan staff, electricians, trash crew, water crew, and communications personnel. ATV’s have proven to be more effective in maneuvering in areas where there is heavy foot traffic, and reduces the number of vehicles on research center roads during this busy event.

**WATER AND RESTROOM FACILITIES** - Water, cups, and trash cans are available at every tour stop. Water coolers are replenished throughout the day, and an ice freezer with 100 bags of ice is available. Portable toilets are available at every tour stop and at various locations across the MNTFD site. A total of 35 portable toilets are required.

**CAPS** - Each year a cap with the MNTFD logo is designed and provided to all the workers as well as attendees to the VIP Breakfast. Caps are available for sale to the general public.

**PARKING LOT** - Parking for the general public is located in a 16 acre field adjacent to the exhibit area. This field is planted in winter wheat, then the individual parking spaces are planted with no-till soybeans to delineate the individual parking spaces. More than 1700 parking spaces are available in the general parking lot, with an additional area available for exhibitors.

**MEDIA TENT** - A media tent is available where members of the media can get information regarding MNTFD. This tent is staffed by members of the UT Institute of

Agriculture Communications Department. Communications staff have access to ATV's and can transport members of the media to particular tour stops to interview specific presenters. Soft drinks and snacks are provided.

**ANNOUNCER STAND** - A public address system is available and broadcasts across the exhibit tent area. Sound bites are pre-recorded for each research tour giving topics to be presented, locations for the tours, and times for the presentations. General MNTFD information is also recorded and played throughout the day.

**TRAFFIC CONTROL/SECURITY** - REC Milan is located on a two-lane highway and lies on the boundary between the city limits of Milan and Gibson County. As a result, we enlist the help of Milan Police, Gibson County Sheriff and Tennessee Highway Patrol to assist with traffic control due to the large volume of traffic. A security guard is hired to provide overnight security the night before the event.

#### **2010 MNTFD STATISTICS**

33 Tents	1700+ Parking Spaces
290 Tables	240+ Workers
950 Chairs	77 Exhibitors
600 Bales Straw	16 Research Tours
25,000 Ft Electrical Wiring	47 Research Presentations
5000 Programs Printed	80 Speakers
15,000 Postcards Mailed	5 Community Events

**MNTFD WEBSITE** - The MNTFD website is: <http://milan.tennessee.edu/MNTFD/>  
Information available on the website includes the MNTFD program, tour report, accommodations, directions to the center, community events, exhibitors, and various other information.

**MNTFD FACEBOOK PAGE** - We hosted a MNTFD FaceBook page and received several hundred hits. This is a non-conventional method of advertising for us, but may become increasingly important with a younger clientele base.

**MNTFD COST** - MNTFD generates income (\$30-35,000/year) from exhibit space rental, a few sponsorships and sales of caps. Expenses range from \$60-70,000 per year. The deficit between income and expenses is shared between UT Agricultural Experiment Station Administration and REC-Milan.

**MTFD CHALLENGES** - With an event of this size the challenges are many.

- Financial challenges are becoming increasingly important. In previous years we received a substantial amount of financial support from industry, but this has declined significantly.

- Maintaining relevance is always a challenge, particularly since no-till technology is no longer new. We strive to focus on the newest technologies and how they might incorporate into a no-till system. The decision to host the MNTFD on a biennial schedule provided more time to keep research current and be able to present new information at each event.

- Logistics are a challenge whenever dealing with large numbers of visitors and workers. This event requires a substantial amount of planning in order that visitors, tour routes, tents, electrical service, porto-potties, water coolers, food, workers, buses, trailers, VIP's, etc. are all where they need to be, when they need to be there.

- Parking - Parking is available in a 16 acre field, but we are subject to problems if a heavy rain were to occur. Fortunately this has only happened one time in 30 years!

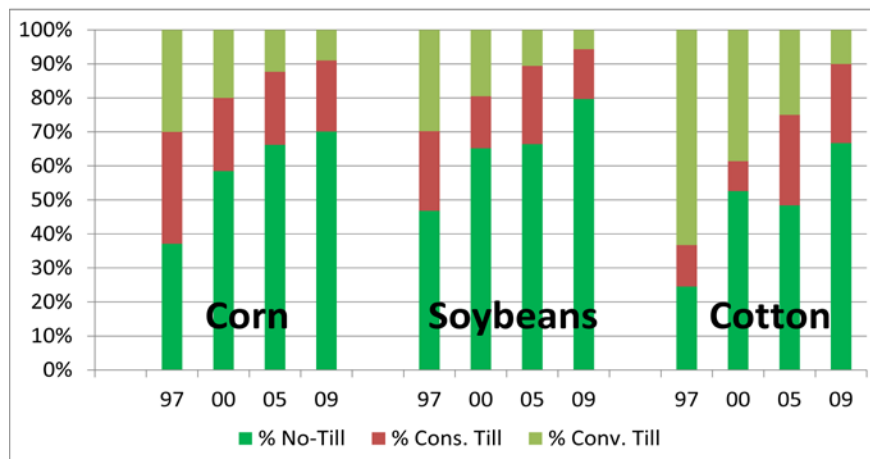
- Number of Workers Required - An event of this size would not be possible without the support of the administrations of the UT Ag Experiment Station and UT Extension. We call on help from across the state, and research and extension personnel come from all over to lend a hand.

- Effort Required by REC-Milan Staff - The staff of the AgResearch and Education Center at Milan (all eleven of us) are fully employed with an active research program, in addition to hosting the MNTFD. We work with approximately 25 PI's on a broad range of projects related to agronomic crops and switchgrass. The years when the MNTFD is held require an extra effort from all of the staff.

- Impact on REC-Milan Research Program - Field day years require an extra effort from all of the staff, and can sometimes have a negative effect on the research program. This is simply a result of the time required in preparation of the event taking away from the need to make timely applications, perform plot maintenance, etc. Every effort is made to minimize this impact but the impacts must be recognized when planning a large scale event.

**SO HAS IT BEEN WORTH IT?**

## Tillage Statistics in TN



**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- Plan, plan, plan
  - Attempt to “head-off” problems before they occur
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
  - Staff, PI's, workers, community, politicians, etc
- Take lots of photographs
  - Document set-up and placement of tents, signs, etc.
- Hold a “Post-mortem” after the event
  - What went well, what didn't?