



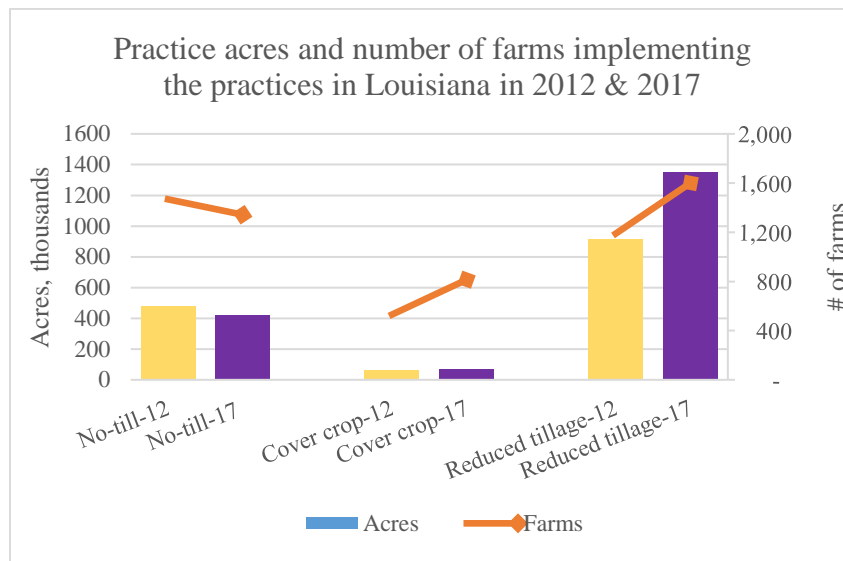
Mixed trend in conservation practices implementation in Louisiana

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Land use practices in Louisiana, as reported by the 2017 Census of Agriculture, show a mixed trend. Some of the practices that are promoted as part of the national soil health improvement initiative such as cover crops, reduced tillage, and no-till have been implemented with mixed interest.

In 2017, no-till practice acres decreased in the state. The same trend is seen with the number of farms implementing the no-till practice. On the other hand, cover crop acres showed a slight increase and so did the number of farms having cover crops. Reduced tillage acres increased the highest in 2017, about 400,000 acres increase compared to 2012. The increase is seen in the number of farms implementing the practices as well. The graph below shows the trend in acres and the number of farms. The steeper the arrow the greater is the increase in the number of farms implementing the practice.



Beyond farm profits, farmers struggle with competing issues with practice implementation. For example, the nature of the soil in some parts of the state demand some form of tillage to allow proper planting and germination. Failure to do so can result in a significant impact to yield and revenues. In addition, farmers implementing no-till practice have reported a slight decrease in yield in initial years. Farmers then have to weigh in a change in net returns. Although programs support initiation of no-till on farms, there seems to be demand for information on the practice and its impacts on crop growth, nutrient use, among others.

The interest in reduced tillage stems from the perception that it is implemented with minimal change to current production practice. On the other hand, no-till where it can be implemented with almost none to minimal change in current practice, it needs a paradigm shift in perception of the practice. The practice should be perceived as allowing long-term transition of farm toward improved soil health. The question still remains, by whom? Programs promoting such practices currently allow some deviation to practice implementation to accommodate natural resource needs such as requiring minimal till to allow proper germination and development of cash crop, proper drainage of irrigation water, among others. Given agencies recognize that these farms are considered *farms in transition*, farmers should consider the long-term benefits of conservation implementation on their farms that can ultimately improve their overall farm returns and benefits beyond farm boundaries.



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