



Final Report and Stewardship Plan

Date: December 30, 2016

Grant: 2015-ERP-2-8

Project: No Till Drill Rental Program

Summary: In May 2015, the White River Natural Resources Conservation District (WRNRCD) received a \$34,550 grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation to purchase a Haybuster 107C for use in a No Till Drill Rental Program. Farmers, landowners, and organizations in Basins 9 and 14 used the equipment to inter-seed pasture and hay land and implement Best Management Practices such as cover cropping. Although WRNRCD did not reach the goal of 650 acres as stated in the first annual report, the total acres recorded was more than expected. The biggest issue with a rental program like this is farmers lent it to each other without talking to WRNRCD, which means the recorded acreage was lower than it should be and proper rental agreements from farmers were sometimes not signed. This is a key issue to focus on in coming years and is discussed further in the stewardship plan. Below is a summary of the program, including total numbers, pictures from the workshops, common feedback, and a stewardship plan.

Number Summary:

- Number of rental agreements=18
- Number of different towns the drill was used=13
- Total acres cover cropped or inter-seeded=532 acres
- Number of workshops held=2
- Number of workshop attendees=33

Feedback: Annual surveys were sent out to all farmers who used the equipment. Through this, WRNRCD was able to compile valuable feedback. All feedback is listed in the annual reports submitted and below is the most common feedback received.

- The Haybuster has great adjustments, is easy to use and the versatility is a plus
- The wider width allows seeding in less passes
- Tubes were plugged when the drill was received. Remind farmers to clean out seed tubes when finished
- More in field technical assistance for crop recommendations would be beneficial
- Need more depth control-sometimes it plants too deep but the tubes can be adjusted slightly
- Seed tubes need to be watched on rocky pastures or the tubes will bend

Workshops: Two workshops were held over the past two years. The goal of each one was to demonstrate proper use of the equipment, provide a venue for farmers to discuss their experiences with practices such as cover cropping, and to draw in new farmers who may not have heard of the rental program just through word of mouth. The first workshop was hosted in Brookfield in the fall of 2015 and the second workshop was hosted in Fairlee the following spring. Both workshops were hosted on a farm in partnership with Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD), UVM Extension, and the White River NRCDC. A total of 33 people attended the events, with many farmers deciding to rent the No Till Drill after learning more. Following are pictures from the workshops.



WHITE RIVER NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
28 Farmvu Dr, White River Junction, VT 05001
whiterivernrcd@gmail.com ~ 802-369-3167



2015 Workshop

2016 Workshop





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Stewardship Plan

The farming community was eager to learn of the rental program and were quick to help one another transporting the equipment to the next destination and volunteering to store it over the winter. As word continues to spread, more new farms have contacted the White River NRCD to inquire about the process. Already, four farms have reserved dates for the spring of 2017. Because the grant funding is over, but hours spent managing rentals and maintaining the equipment will continue through its life, an alternative means of income for the program had to be decided. The idea of a rental fee was discussed with some farmers, and all were supportive. Along with finding funds to continue the rental program, there were some common issues that need to be addressed as the program evolves. Below is a table of expenses/issues and solutions that will be implemented at the start of the new year.

Expense/Issue	Solution
Administrative hours (time spent managing rental agreements and scheduling)	Rental fee of \$3/acre
Equipment maintenance	Rental fee and volunteer hours from some farmers
Winter storage	Multiple farms have volunteered to do this
Future workshops	Volunteer hours from partners such as the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance, farmers, and funds from the general district
Equipment not cleaned before arriving at next farm	Attach a large sign to the drill that states: PLEASE VACUUM OUT THE SEED BOX WHEN DONE If this is still not done, send an invoice to the farm for an extra maintenance fee
No rental form signed by next farm (this has happened due to farms lending out to friends and neighbors without involving WRNRCD)	Attach a large sign to the drill that states: PLEASE CONTACT THE WHITE RIVER NRCD BEFORE USING (802)369-3167 Those that do not will not be allowed to use it again until the original rental fee is paid

Changes to the rental program will be stated in the new rental agreement form. Copies of the rental agreement form will also be placed in the container with the instruction manual. This container will be secured more tightly and will have a bright label affixed to it. As the new state laws come into effect, cover cropping will become more widespread and use of the No Till Drill will increase. Changes to the rental program are necessary, but WRNRCD expects that regular users will be supportive and help enforce the standard operating procedures. The No Till Drill is an invaluable service that the White River NRCD can offer its farming community, and we look forward to new renters and continued use through its life.