

## **Farmers set up their own research facility**

by Laura Rance

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Two years ago, the idea of a research facility run by farmers was just wishful thinking on the part of a few Manitoba producers using zero tillage.

Now, they are watching in amazement as that wish comes true. With a special "sod returning" ceremony, the Manitoba Zero Tillage Research farm opened in Forrest, Manitoba for business recently.

"We can just hardly believe things came together so well," said Robert Stevenson, the Kenton, Man., farmer who is chairman of the Manitoba Zero Tillage Research Association.

Both industry and government agencies jumped at the chance to assist the group with financing and equipment. "We never had a door slammed in our face," said Birtle farmer Garth Butcher, a co-founder of the project. He believes that's because they had the right idea at the right time.

Conservation tillage is a hot topic in farm circles these days. A decade ago, it was too radical for most.

"If we'd tried this 10 years ago, it would have been more difficult," Butcher said.

### **Testing**

The Manitoba research farm is a section of land that will be devoted to testing ways that farmers can make use of practices that are good for the environment and yet still make a living.

It's one of three established on the Prairies this year with support from the federal government's Parkland Agricultural Research Initiative program and from Ducks Unlimited Canada's Prairie CARE program.

The other farms are located near Mundare, in northeastern Alberta, and near Prince Albert in north-central Saskatchewan. All three farms are managed by a board of directors dominated by farmers, and will function as commercial farms.

But the Manitoba project has a few features that make it unique.

More than \$50,000 of the funds invested in the Manitoba farm come from 130 direct farmer memberships sold at \$200 a piece and from a \$30,000 contribution from the Manitoba-North Dakota Zero Tillage Farmers Association.

As well, the Manitoba board of directors plans to buy the farm outright from its earnings over the next decade.

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