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First meeting of the working group on controlled traffic farming (CTF)

At the 16th ISTRO conference in Brisbane, 2003, a small group of people established a new working group. It aims to review the benefits and shortcomings of controlled traffic farming systems, identify knowledge gaps and research areas requiring further work, particularly regarding tillage, traffic and soil structure. In addition, the group aims to encourage and facilitate the use of CTF in various ecozones, to achieve economic, environmental and food quality benefits.



On 6 and 7 July 2004, 11 (of the 33 interested) people participated in the first meeting at Silsoe, UK, organised and kindly hosted by Tim Chamen. In an informal atmosphere, we found ourselves mainly discussing about how to advocate CTF and have more farmers trying it. Although the potential for specific situations still needs to be proven (root crops, different climates, combination with plough/no-till, weed management benefits), we are convinced that CTF has benefits in all situations and can solve many problems. We see no serious drawbacks requiring research before trying implementation on a farm scale. Therefore, further R&D should 1) help farmers to get CTF working, 2) maximise benefits for specific situations, and 3) monitor situation-specific benefits and drawbacks.

The actual priority is to convince others so that selected farmers start adopting CTF principles. We need to involve various problem-owners (farmers, contractors, implement manufacturers, food industry, environmental organizations and governments) and clearly communicate the potential of CTF to provide solutions. Rather than promoting a mechanization system, we concluded that we should focus more on universal system benefits (workable days, machine use efficiency, flexibility, soil structure, energy use, uniformity, doing things right makes farming easier and more rewarding) and on solving problems (e.g. erosion, weed control in both conventional and organic farming, biodiversity, compaction). We made a good start developing strategies to do so.

On the afternoon of the 6th July, we visited three farms, of which one employs a 6-m gantry to perform all operations except harvesting cereals. The key issue on all visited farms was how to adapt the wheel spacings and working widths of all machinery, to take full advantage of not wheeling the soil. In onions, extending the use of the 1.8 m wide beds (which are established after ploughing until harvest) into the following crop would require a significant change in field logistics (but which would reduce a major cost component as well).

For more information on CTF, please refer to www.controlledtrafficfarming.com. If you would like to participate in the working group, please contact us at info@controlledtrafficfarming.com

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