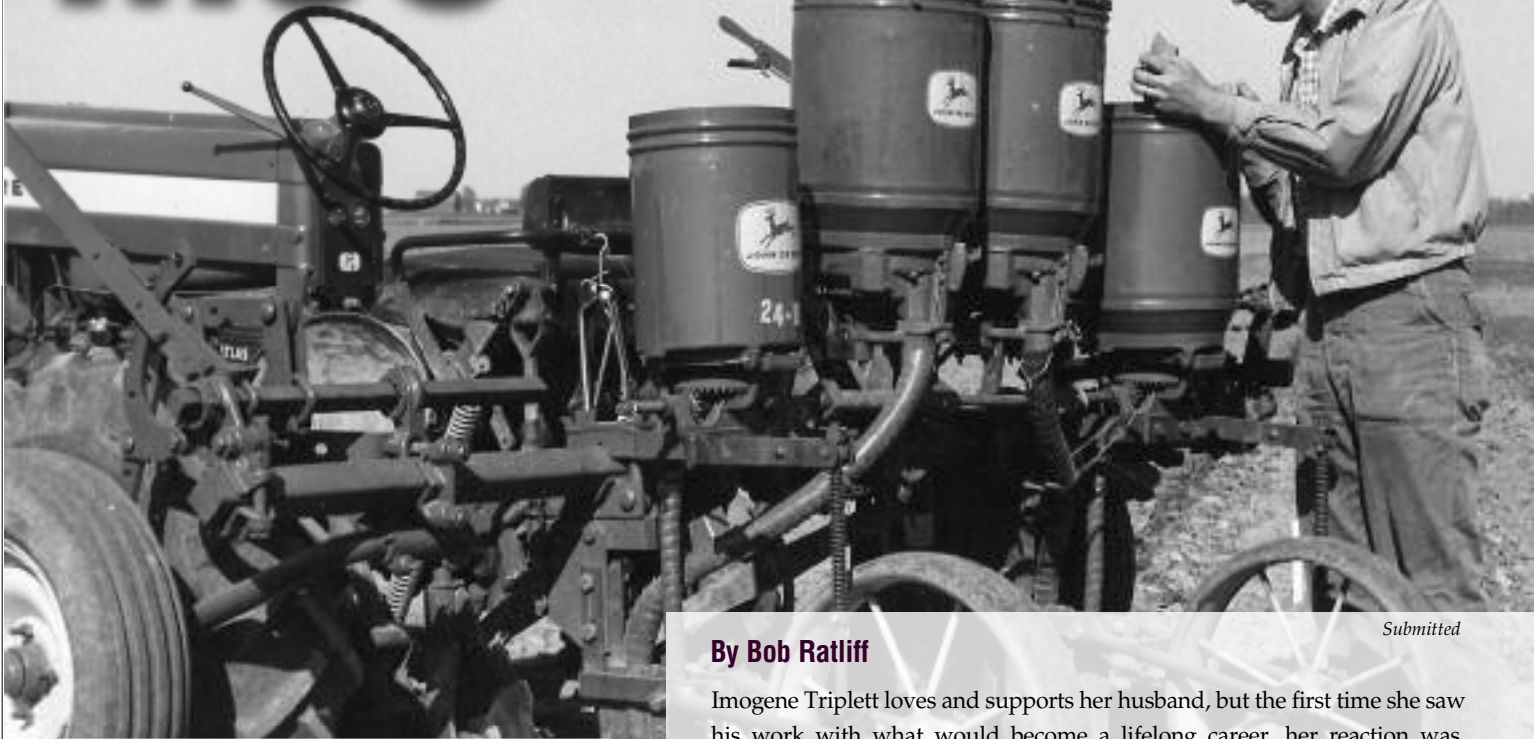


# MSU

## Researcher Makes Career of “Ugly Farming”



*Submitted*

**By Bob Ratliff**

Imogene Triplett loves and supports her husband, but the first time she saw his work with what would become a lifelong career, her reaction was, “Glover this looks terrible, they’re going to fire you!”

Luckily he wasn’t fired, but at the time, his wife wasn’t the only one with doubts about Glover Triplett’s work. In 1960, Triplett, an agronomist, and Dave Van Doren, a soil physicist, began research at Ohio State University with growing crops in ground that was not plowed. Termed no-tillage farming, or “no-till,” the method went against what most farmers at the time considered the only proper way to grow crops.

Instead of using a plow to loosen the soil and form rows, no-till farming uses specialized equipment to plant seeds into almost undisturbed soil and crop residue. The use of herbicides for weed control and other management techniques replace plowing during the growing season.

Triplett, now an agronomist at Mississippi State University, grew up in Crawford and the surrounding countryside of Noxubee County, where he saw firsthand the effects of farming without considering its long-term impact on the land.

“When this region was first cleared of trees, it was farmed until the top soil was depleted and productivity declined,” he said. “The fields were then abandoned.”

The same thing happened in successive waves across the South and other areas of the country, he added. Fields were plowed and farmed until soil nutrients were depleted or topsoil was lost to erosion. Farmers then cleared new fields in the same area or just moved further west.

By the 1950s, there was enough national concern about erosion and the loss of productive farmland to generate support for the work by Triplett and Van Doren at Ohio State.



*Russ Houston*

Glover and Imogene Triplett recently endowed a chair in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences. In 1964, top photo, the Triplett's were at Ohio State University, where he conducted pioneering research in no-till farming.

"At the time, farmers called what we were doing 'ugly farming,' but we showed growers looking to convert depleted fields back to productive cropland that no-tillage is the way to do it," Triplett said.

The management practices Triplett helped pioneer in Ohio led to the acceptance of no-till farming in this country and around the world.

In 1982, Triplett retired from Ohio State, and he and his wife, also a Noxubee County native, returned to Mississippi. Triplett has continued his no-till research with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at MSU.

Breakthroughs in technology, he said, have helped advance the use of no-till farming.

"During the past 7 or 8 years, technology has reached the point where I could successfully grow corn in a home lawn or cow pasture in Mississippi using no-till," Triplett said. "Seed with built-in resistance to herbicides make weed control easier and more effective in no-till crops."

In the South, no-till works best with corn and soybeans, but the method also works well with cotton, Triplett added.

During his long career, Triplett has received numerous honors, including the designation of Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy and the dedication of the original no-till rotation plots at Ohio State as the "Triplett-Van Doren No-Tillage Experimental Plots."

"One of the exciting things after working all these years on this thing is seeing so much acreage planted to no-till," he said. "There are now well over 60 million acres of no-till crops in the United States and millions more worldwide."

The Triplett's recently designated part of their estate to help continue his work. Proceeds from the sale of a 1,063-acre tract of timberland in Noxubee County will fund the first fully endowed chair in MSU's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The Dr. Glover B. Triplett Endowed Chair in Agronomy in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences will provide leadership in agronomy education and research, as well as outreach to industry, said Michael Collins, head of the Department of Plant and Soil Science.

"The endowed chair funded by Dr. and Mrs. Triplett's contribution will be invaluable in furthering farming-systems research in Mississippi," Collins said. "This endowed position will allow us to continue the kind of cutting-edge research for which Dr. Triplett himself is so well known."

Triplett earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at Mississippi State before completing a doctorate at Michigan State University in 1959.

The endowed chair continues a record of giving by the Triplett's to Mississippi State. Mrs. Triplett established the Imogene C. Triplett Endowed Scholarship in ornamental horticulture and retail floristry management for Mississippi residents. The couple also established the Dr. Glover B. Triplett Endowed Fund for Crop Research, which provides funds specifically for the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences.



## Good Grazing, No Mud Benefits of No-till Corn

Bob Ratliff

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Walking through a corn field just a few hours after a heavy rain usually means wading through mud, but that was not the case during a stroll through a no-till field one July morning.

"If we had planted using conventional tillage, our feet would be muddy," said MSU agronomist Glover Triplett during the walk through his 27-acre corn-for-grazing test plot at the MSU dairy farm. "There is no mud because the soil was not plowed before the corn was planted."

Little, if any, erosion is another benefit of no-till planting.

"There are three stages to erosion: detachment of soil particles, transport of the particles and deposition of the particles in another location," Triplett said. "Because the ground cover does not have to be disturbed in a no-till field, any soil loosened by rain is almost immediately redeposited."

In addition to preventing erosion, the 2007 plot at the MSU dairy also produced grazing to support up to two cows per acre for two to three months, depending on the stocking rate.

"The corn held up well despite very dry conditions early in the growing season and took off once rain returned in early July," Triplett said. "We'll begin grazing in strips when the corn has grain in the milk stage, which should be about the third week of July."

The no-till plot was planted using Roundup Ready seed, and an application of Roundup plus atrazine was made before emergence to control weeds. A second application of Roundup was applied about three weeks later. The corn also received an application of 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre, plus an application of manure from the dairy.

One Lafayette County livestock producer has been using no-till corn in his operation for several years, and Triplett said other producers are watching his plot at the dairy.

One of the questions he is frequently asked by livestock producers is about compaction.

"They want to know if ground that has been walked on by cows for years has been compacted too much to grow corn without tillage," he said. "Earthworms do a good job of keeping the soil open so water will infiltrate."