

Operator & Land Return by Practice

Average per-acre difference associated with each conservation practice class



Precision Conservation Management

Each table reports the 11-year average **Operator & Land Return (\$/acre)** for every practice class, alongside the difference (Δ) versus the most profitable class in that category. Figures are pulled directly from the PCM Data Book and reflect high-SPR fields; they do **not** include conservation incentive payments.

Tillage		OPERATOR & LAND RETURN, \$/ACRE	
Practice class	O&L return	Δ vs. most profitable	
CORN			
1-pass light	\$348	Most profitable	
No-till	\$346	-\$2	
2-pass light	\$341	-\$7	
2+ tillage passes	\$331	-\$17	
2-pass moderate	\$327	-\$21	
Strip-till	\$318	-\$30	
SOYBEAN			
1-pass light	\$442	Most profitable	
2-pass moderate	\$440	-\$2	
2-pass light	\$437	-\$5	
2+ tillage passes	\$426	-\$16	
No-till	\$423	-\$19	
Strip-till	\$409	-\$33	

Spread across classes: ~\$30/ac (corn), ~\$33/ac (soybean). No-till, strip-till, and one light pass all cluster near the top — heavier tillage gives up the most.

Nitrogen timing

CORN · OPERATOR & LAND RETURN, \$/ACRE

N timing class	O&L return	Δ vs. most profitable
Mostly preplant	\$346	Most profitable
>40% fall	\$340	-\$6
Mostly sidedress	\$339	-\$7
50% pre / 50% sidedress	\$317	-\$29
3-way split	\$311	-\$35
Spread across classes: ~\$35/ac. Mostly preplant narrowly edges fall; the multi-pass split timings trail the field.		

Nitrogen rate

CORN · AVG OPERATOR & LAND RETURN, \$/ACRE

Total N rate (lbs/acre)	O&L return	Δ vs. most profitable
151–175	\$354	Most profitable
176–200	\$345	-\$9
<150	\$343	-\$11
201–225	\$336	-\$18
225+	\$328	-\$26
Spread across classes: ~\$26/ac. Returns peak in the 151–175 lb band and fall off steadily above 200 lbs — leaner rates win.		

Cover crops

OPERATOR & LAND RETURN, \$/ACRE · BEFORE INCENTIVES

Practice class	O&L return	Δ vs. no cover crop
CORN		
No cover crop	\$341	Highest (raw)
Winter terminal	\$294–\$344	+\$3 to -\$47
Overwintering	\$280–\$330	-\$11 to -\$61
SOYBEAN		
No cover crop	\$437	Highest (raw)
Winter terminal	\$394–\$444	+\$7 to -\$43
Overwintering	\$383–\$433	-\$4 to -\$54

On raw return, cover crops carry a cost. But the ranges close — and the top of the winter-terminal range exceeds no-cover-crop — once incentive payments are stacked, profitability can be held flat while soil-health and water-quality benefits accrue.