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Whether conservation tillage practices for rice fallow sesame crop could sustain low-land rice-sesame production systems in the Cauvery Delta - results of a field investigation

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Rice is a predominant *kbharif* season crop in Southeast Asia and, in particular, in India, it is grown both under irrigated and rainfed conditions in various cropping systems occupying about 43 mha. But a large chunk of this area remains uncultivated or left as fallow in the subsequent season *rabi* or post-rainy season. In the Cauvery Delta Zone (CDZ) which lies in the eastern part of Tamil Nadu, rice is the principal crop. In the rice based cropping system, it is either single or double cropped. CDZ comprises of Thanjavur, Nagapattinam and parts of Pudukkottai districts – with its alluvial soil, hitherto was popular for rice garden (rice-rice-rice in a single year), is struggling to produce single season rice crop. The single season rice (*samba*) is supported by northwest monsoon and the subsequent season remains fallow due to several constraints. To utilize these areas and to cope up with the increasing demand of oilseeds in the country, being short duration in nature, sesame could be an ideal candidate. Location specific and economically viable technology for better performance of sesame are need to be standardized. It is hypothesised that conservation tillage practices may aid to establish the fallow sesame crop by utilising the residual moisture and nutrients supplied to rice crop. Considering the above and the scope for area expansion in rice fallow areas, a field investigation was conducted to identify suitable tillage method and nutrient management technique for rice fallow/follow sesame based cropping system at TNAU-Tamil Nadu Rice Research Institute, Aduthurai during 2019-20. The study evaluated three tillage practices for sesame *viz.*, farmer's practice (Conventional tillage), minimum tillage and zero tillage in the main plot with five levels of nutrient doses (0, 25, 50, 75 and 100% RDF) in the subplot. Rice was sown during 34th meteorological standard week (MSW) and transplanted during 37th MSW (2019) and was harvested during 4th MSW (2020) followed by sesame sowing as the tillage and nutrient dose treatments. The results revealed that sowing of sesame after harvest of rice with conventional tillage (ploughing twice followed by rotavator) recorded the highest sesame seed yield (477 kg/ha) although profitability (B:C ratio of 1.81) was scored by minimum tillage, the intermittent form of conservation tillage. Further, a minimum of 50% recommended dose of fertilizer (RDF) should be applied to the rice fallow sesame, however which yielded statistically on par yield to higher doses. Being rice fallow, the income obtained from sesame will be an additional income with the use of available resources.