

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Corn Disease Management Thoughts

The corn ‘disease of focus’ the past couple of years has been Tar Spot. We’ve answered the question of will it get here (yes...) and know it’s already present in some Northeast Kansas fields (about three weeks earlier than normal). That information helps us evaluate management for Tar Spot, but don’t forget other diseases or general management along the way.

Southern Rust is typically our *other* disease of concern most seasons. It usually shows up a little later in the season relying on spores being transported from the southern reaches of the country via wind/weather events to get it here in time to be a problem. Thus far, it has yet to be detected *anywhere* in the country, and while that may change, it’s not yet a pressing issue.

Whether it’s Tar Spot or Southern Rust or other diseases (Common Rust, Gray Leaf Spot), fungicide best management practices remain the same. Sure, the products might be different (see efficacy ratings from the Corn Disease Working Group at: <https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/publications/fungicide-efficacy-for-control-of-corn-diseases>) but the goal is still to utilize fungicides in an appropriate manner to control disease and retain product effectiveness for the long haul.

Start by avoiding the assumption a fungicide is a necessity. Hybrid susceptibility, field history, previous crop, and weather should all be considered. For example, Southern Rust likes warm days/nights (> 80 degrees) and high humidity while Tar Spot prefers mild temperatures (60F to 73F), high relative humidity (>75%), and greater than seven hours of leaf wetness.

Next, keep scouting. While there are predictive apps (Field Prophet and Tarspotter come to mind...) as well as tracking websites like Corn ipmPIPE (<https://corn.ipmpipe.org/>), scouting is still necessary. Most apps aren’t yet predicting Tar Spot in the Meadowlark District – but it’s here. Take a firsthand look at fields to see when diseases arrive and if treatment is necessary.

If disease *is* present at pressures great enough to warrant a fungicide application, hold off until VT-R1 when possible (in some cases, it may not be...). Fungicide efficacy likely won’t last much past three to four weeks, opening the door to late season infestations. If applications can be delayed, they can help with later developing diseases to protect the crop further into grain fill.

Corn disease pressure is concerning and sometimes a fungicide is necessary. When deciding, keep the above factors in mind to help make decisions to maximize the application’s return on investment and retain fungicide efficacy.