K-STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

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Corn Stunt Disease

The end of the growing season doesn't always mean the end of paying attention to crop diseases. A newly confirmed-in Kansas corn disease is one example. Corn stunt disease and its associated vector, the corn leafhopper, have been confirmed in the state for the first time (it was also just recently found in Oklahoma and Missouri). Found first in central and southwest Kansas – at low incidence - it has been noted in NEK fields as well.

With corn mostly dried down, it will be difficult to see the symptomatic red/purple discoloration on plant leaves (note: other factors result in red or purple leaf discoloration as well), but you may note stunted plants with shortened internodes. While there's nothing to do about it now, note such areas in case they arise again in the future. If plants still have some green left in them (dry leaves not recommended), you can submit them for testing to the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab. This will help us confirm whether it really is corn stunt disease and see how widespread it might be. Previously limited to southern Texas, Florida, and California, additional observations are needed to see if its presence is expanding here.

This disease is spread only by the corn leafhopper which has not previously been seen in Kansas but *has* been confirmed here this fall. The corn leafhopper acquires pathogens within minutes of feeding on infected corn plants, but it can take up to 30 days for the leafhopper to infect healthy corn plants during feeding events. In addition to symptomatic plants, we are currently monitoring for corn leafhoppers as well to determine their coverage area and whether they are an overwintering pest here. Leafhoppers are light tan to yellowish white in color and approximately an eighth of an inch long with two distinct dark spots between the antennae and eyes. Like most leafhoppers, they move quickly when disturbed and hide in shaded areas of corn plants (search for them early in the morning when movement is reduced or use a sweep net).

For more information on corn stunt disease, feel free to contact me at any of our Meadowlark Extension District Offices or via email to dhallaue@ksu.edu . Additional information can also be found in a pretty good article from Oklahoma State University Extension at: https://extension.okstate.edu/e-pest-alerts/2024/corn-leafhopper-leads-to-corn-stunt-outbreak-across-oklahoma-aug-12-2024.html .