

Southern Rust and Tar Spot Emerging as Corn Hits R2-R3:

Southern rust and tar spot are beginning to make their presence known just as much of the Renk sales area moves into the critical brown silk (R2) to milk (R3) stages. Most corn in our footprint is a few months out from harvest, leaving a long window where disease pressure can erode yield potential, weaken stalks, and impact grain quality.

Southern rust has been seen in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and South Dakota. **Tar spot** has been seen in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In both cases, most of the early detections have been in the **lower leaf canopy**, where humidity is highest and leaf wetness persists the longest. While this is encouraging in the sense that upper-canopy leaves are still largely healthy, it's also a reminder that both diseases can move upward quickly if weather favors their development.



Southern rust thrives in warm, humid conditions and can spread rapidly once established in the mid to upper canopy, reducing photosynthesis and accelerating plant stress. Tar spot, while often slower to build, can escalate late in the season—especially under cool, damp conditions—leading to stalk cannibalization and increasing ear mold risk.

At this stage, most fields are past the point where fungicide applications would deliver an economic return. Management now shifts from prevention to preparation. The focus should be on tracking disease progression, monitoring stalk strength, and prioritizing harvest order.

Scouting in the coming weeks should include both **disease progression checks**—looking for lesions or pustules creeping into the ear leaf zone—and **standability tests**. If 10–15% or more

of plants fail a pinch or push test, those fields should be scheduled for earlier harvest. Ears should be examined for husk integrity and signs of mold, particularly in higher-pressure areas.

Grain from disease-impacted fields often comes in lighter and with more variable moisture. Adjust combine settings to minimize kernel damage and fines, and dry to 14% moisture or less for safe storage.

With the crop still months from harvest, this is the time to stay ahead of potential lodging and grain quality losses. By scouting regularly, adjusting harvest timing, and managing residue post-harvest, growers can protect this year's yield while reducing inoculum pressure for 2026.

References:

- Iowa State University Extension & Outreach – Late-Season Corn Disease Management (2024)
- University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension – *Tar Spot and Southern Rust in Corn: Scouting and Management* (2024)

Sudden Death Syndrome in Soybeans— What to Watch For and How to Respond

Sudden Death Syndrome (SDS) is beginning to show in soybeans across parts of the Midwest as August brings pod fill and cooler nights. This disease, caused by the soilborne fungus *Fusarium virguliforme*, can quietly reduce yield long before visible symptoms appear. Understanding how to identify SDS early and knowing your management options are key to minimizing its impact this year and in the seasons ahead.

What to look for now

SDS symptoms often begin with yellow flecking between leaf veins, progressing to brown necrotic areas while the leaf veins remain green. As the disease advances, affected leaves may drop prematurely, leaving petioles still attached to the stem. In severe cases, plants may abort pods or produce small, shriveled beans.

A telltale feature of SDS is that root and stem tissue decay occurs even when the leaves still appear relatively healthy. Splitting the stem will reveal a healthy-looking outer stem but a decayed, discolored cortex inside. Fields infected early may also exhibit poor pod set and reduced seed size, even if foliage symptoms are only moderate.



Why timing matters

SDS infections start early in the season, often at or shortly after planting, when cool, wet soils favor fungal activity. Symptoms, however, usually don't appear until reproductive stages—often during pod fill—when the fungus produces toxins that move upward into the plant. Once symptoms are visible in August, the damage is largely done for this crop, making proactive management essential for future seasons.

Management options

In-season:

There are no curative treatments for SDS once symptoms are visible. The most important action now is scouting to identify the extent of infection and recording affected areas for future management.

For future seasons:

- **Resistant varieties:** Choose soybean varieties with strong SDS resistance ratings for high-risk fields.
- **Seed treatments:** Products containing ILEVO® or Saltro can reduce early infection and delay symptom expression. Renk's SDS Package uses Saltro for its SDS control.
- **Planting date adjustments:** Later planting into warmer soils can lower early-season infection risk.
- **SCN management:** Soybean cyst nematodes (SCN) interact with SDS, increasing severity; choose SCN-resistant varieties and rotate to non-host crops.

Bottom line

Once SDS symptoms appear in August, there's no way to reverse the damage for this season—but identifying problem fields now sets the stage for better management next year. Resistance, seed treatments, SCN control, and crop rotation remain the most effective tools to keep SDS from becoming an annual yield drag.

References:

- Iowa State University Extension & Outreach – *Soybean Sudden Death Syndrome: Identification and Management* (2024)
- University of Illinois Extension – *Sudden Death Syndrome in Soybean* (2023)