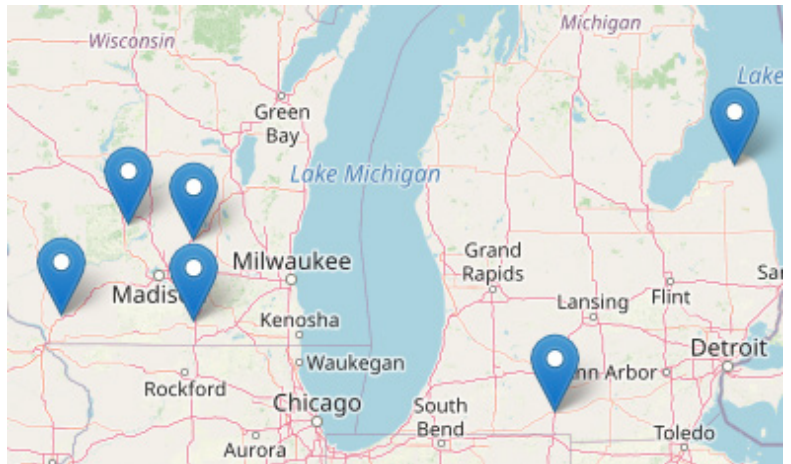


## Fall Corn Observations Recap: Southern WI & MI

*Karl Bobholz, Corn Product Manager*

Last week's fall corn observations across southern Wisconsin and Michigan revealed a good corn crop finishing the season but under a mix of late-season pressures. At the southern Wisconsin site, tar spot arrived late but still showed signs of knocking off some of the top-end yield, with a touch of southern rust present as well. Across most locations we noted tighter husks and weaker late-season stalks, a reminder of how end-of-season plant health affects standability. Michigan sites added another layer of stress: at Kinde, limited rainfall created moisture stress, while at Coldwater, warm nights pushed plant respiration higher. These observations are shaping our understanding of hybrid performance under diverse conditions and will guide Renk's 2025 product placement and management recommendations.



### Spongy Ears and Ear Mold: A 2025 Deep Dive

Across much of the Midwest in 2025, growers and agronomists are reporting ears that feel soft or “spongy” to the touch, often coupled with visible mold. This isn't a typical ear rot scenario. Instead, it's largely tied to premature plant or ear death, which stops normal husk development and creates ideal conditions for fungal growth.

**How Plant Health Sets the Stage:** under healthy conditions, as corn reaches full maturity, husks loosen and dry down, allowing air to circulate and kernels to finish hardening. But when plants die prematurely—often due to heavy disease or stress—the husk may die or remain tight instead of loosening. This traps moisture and restricts airflow, setting the stage for fungal invasion.

In 2025, several plant health issues are especially contributing to early death:

- **Southern rust** moving north earlier and more aggressively than usual, robbing plants of photosynthetic capacity during grain fill.
- **Tar spot** intensifying in pockets of the upper Midwest, accelerating premature leaf senescence and stress on the ear.
- **Crown rots and stalk rots** (such as *Gibberella*, *Fusarium*, and *Anthraco*) compromising water and nutrient flow, weakening plants and hastening plant death.

This disease pressure effectively “shuts down” the plant before the ear finishes drying naturally. Husks remain tight or bleached, and internal ear tissues soften. Even when kernels appear intact, the cob may feel spongy as internal decay advances. Mold fungi then flourish in the moist, enclosed environment, colonizing from the tip or through weakened tissue.

**Field Clues to Watch:** spongy ears often show tight, prematurely dry husks that do not peel back easily. The cob may feel soft or doughy, and discoloration or mold patches may develop at the tip or along the kernel rows. In some cases, the external mold arrives after internal decay has already begun, making the problem less visible until late in the season or at harvest.

**Why It Matters:** spongy ears and ear mold reduce test weight, grain quality, and marketable yield. Mycotoxin contamination can rise under these conditions, even when external mold symptoms look minor. Loads with hidden damage or contamination may be downgraded or rejected, and affected grain often deteriorates more quickly in storage.

**References:**

- Crop Protection Network. "Diplodia Ear Rot of Corn." 2025.
- Kansas State University Agronomy eUpdate. "Late-Season Rainfall, Moldy Corn Ears, and Premature Kernel Sprouting." 2025.

## New Product Spotlights

### RK6555VT4PRO | 102 RM | VT4PRO™ RIB Complete®



- Outstanding yield potential supported by strong agronomics.
- Exceptional emergence and vigor ensure rapid early growth.
- Broad east-to-west adaptability.
- Best at 30–34k populations.
- Soil fit: 7/9 on coarse | 8/9 on fine.
- Yield rating: High 9 | Medium 8 | Low 6



### RK7524G | 107 RM | Glyphosate Tolerant

- A robust dual-purpose hybrid driven by strong agronomics.
- Reliable emergence and vigorous early growth.
- Broadly adaptable across diverse growing regions.
- Works best at 28–32k populations.
- Soil fit: 8/9 on coarse | 8/9 on fine.
- Yield rating: High 8 | Medium 8 | Low 8

