THE EARFULL
October 21, 2025

RENK • SEED

Late-Season Stalk Concerns: Weather, Disease, and the Push to Finish

The 2025 growing season delivered one of the most variable weather patterns in recent memory — and as combines roll, those effects are showing up across the Corn Belt.

Much of the region began the year with abundant soil moisture, promoting deep roots and strong early canopies. Frequent rains and warm July nights kept corn actively growing but also limited nighttime respiration, adding hidden stress to corn crop. Then came cooler August temperatures with fog-filled mornings that increased humidity and leaf wetness. By early September, a dry turn across the Corn Belt — Illinois and Indiana also had a dry July and August — layered on additional stress.

That sequence — wet early, hot mid-season, and cool, humid late — created ideal conditions for foliar diseases and subsequent stalk degradation heading into harvest.

Weather's Chain Reaction on Plant Health

Warm, wet July conditions supported early establishment of Southern Rust and Northern Corn Leaf Blight. As August cooled, Tar Spot capitalized on prolonged leaf wetness from dew and fog. In several areas, anthracnose stalk rot and top dieback also appeared under these same cool, damp nights — often showing up as lesions on stalks or upper canopy dieback while lower leaves remain green.

Even in fields that received fungicide applications, disease progression was evident as most products offer roughly 21 days of protection. As these late-season diseases reduced green leaf area during grain fill, plants were forced to pull sugars from the stalk to complete ear development. The result: weakened stalks, increased lodging, and faster field deterioration — particularly in high-yield or high-population environments.

What We're Seeing Across the Belt

- Full-canopy, long grain-fill fields are showing increased stalk lodging — even where grain moisture remains above 20% H2O.
- Dry late-season conditions following early rainfall compounded stress, accelerating stalk senescence and reducing standability.
- Northern regions with consistently wetter soils are also seeing stalk quality issues — likely tied to prolonged soil saturation and early seedling disease infections that weakened plants before tassel.

Key Takeaway

The 2025 sequence of wet early soils, warm July nights, cool foggy August mornings, and a dry September finish created a "perfect storm" for late-season foliar disease and stalk breakdown. Anthracnose, Tar Spot, Southern Rust, and NCLB collectively shortened the effective grain-fill window and pushed plants to cannibalize their own reserves.

As harvest continues, expect variable stalk quality, more lodging in high-yield or stressed areas, and faster field decline as grain dries rapidly. With more frequent weather fronts and high winds in the forecast, now's the time to stay ahead of harvest logistics and protect yield from the lingering impacts of a challenging season.

New Product Spotlights

RK4502VT2P

91 RM | VT Double PRO® RIB Complete®

- Significant improvement in yield over prior early maturities.
- Designed to thrive in northern spring conditions.
- Excellent fit across northern zones for grain or silage.
- Plant at **28–32k populations**.
- Soil fit: **8/9 on coarse | 8/9 on fine**.
- Yield rating: **High 9 | Medium 9 | Low 8**.

RK4545AV

93 RM | Agrisure Viptera® 3110

- Outstanding performance across all yield levels.
- Reliable early-season growth, even in cool soils.
- Versatile dual-purpose option with excellent feed quality.
- Works best at **28–32k populations**.
- Soil fit: **8/9 on coarse | 8/9 on fine**.
- Yield rating: **High 9 | Medium 8 | Low 8**.

RK5518TRE

97 RM | Trecepta® RIB Complete®

- Outstanding performance with strong top-end yield potential.
- Excellent emergence and rapid early growth.
- Broadly adaptable, including drought-prone areas.
- Performs best at **32–36k populations**.
- Soil fit: **8/9 on coarse | 8/9 on fine**.
- Yield rating: **High 8 | Medium 8 | Low 7**.