

NEWSLETTER

Driftless Ag Update

Ag news for La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford Counties from UW-Madison Extension

Agriculture Institute



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Please contact your local extension office for the print version of any article included in this newsletter.



Here's your September Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our September Driftless Ag Update!

This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educator Sam Bibby (crops).



Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby

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-Corn silage is slowly starting across the region and while it might be slowed down by wet weather in the next week the corn moisture is dropping. We have seen an increase in foliar disease in corn over the last month which will likely drop plant moisture faster than expected. Read Damon's article below on corn disease and check out this article on measuring corn If you would like help measuring corn silage moisture, give me a call.

- Applications for free scholarships to the Wisconsin Water and Soil Health Conference close on September 14th. 90 full scholarships are available, covering two-day registration, one night's hotel stay, and dinner! Preference is given to first-time farmer attendees, but all are encouraged to apply; no rigid prerequisites, just a desire to learn, network, and grow.

Pictures from the Field



We had a great turnout at the 2026 Extension Weed Management Workshop yesterday Sep 2nd. Over 130 folks showed up to learn more about killing weeds. If you missed it, no worries, we will do it again next year.



I am working with a group in Extension to evaluate different harvest methods for flax fiber in Wisconsin. This is part of a bigger effort to build out a flax fiber market for farmers in WI. (on a side note, if you know anyone interested in harvesting their own flax fiber, they are welcome to come pull their own)

Upcoming Events



Badger Crop Connect 2026

The Badger Crop Connect webinar series returns Thurs., April 9 at 12:30 p.m. and continues every second and fourth Thursday of the month through October. Tune in for research updates and timely topics for the Wisconsin farmer or agronomist. CCA CEUs available.

Register:
https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/

Great River Graziers Pasture Walks

Join the Great River Graziers for some great pasture walks all summer. These pasture walks are great opportunities to network and learn what is/isn't working on neighboring farms.

See page 5 for details



Biosecurity and Premises Mapping Workshops for Sheep and Livestock Producers in Gays Mills on October 13

Sheep producers and livestock owners are invited to attend two complimentary workshops focused on protecting animal health, enhancing disease preparedness, and strengthening farm resilience on Monday, October 13, 2026, at the Gays Mills Community Commerce Center, Gays Mills, Wisconsin. The workshop is open to all who are interested.



2026 Grass Works Grazing School – Sept. 16–17 in Marshfield

Wisconsin graziers looking to expand livestock handling and pasture management knowledge and develop their skills are invited to join Grassworks' Sept. 16 – 17 Grazing School in Marshfield.

Upcoming Events



Byron Seeds GrassWorks Grazing Mix Field Day and Farm Tour

Join Byron Seeds, GrassWorks, and the Bad Axe Watershed Stewards for a great field day on September 30th from 10:00am to 3:00pm at Garden Ridge Ranch and Retreat outside of Viroqua. The event is free, but registration is required by 9/23 for a lunch count.



GREAT RIVER GRAZIERS

EST. 1993

2026 Pasturewalks

All are welcome!
Facilitated by Vance Haugen (507) 459-0495
grg@crawfordstewardship.org
www.crawfordstewardship.org/grg
****check Facebook for schedule updates****

Tuesday May 12 10:30 am	Joe Childs Sparking Ln. Gays Mills, WI	Location is just outside Mt. Zion. Topic: watering cattle without a well or access to ponds. Joe's operation is a great example of "custom grazing" - where the grazier doesn't own the cattle or the land, but manages both for a head/day fee.
Tuesday May 26 10:30 am	Matthew Canter E7630 Rognstad Ridge Cashton, WI	Fertility with sawdust and manure compost. Timing of pasture moves to make the most of added fertility. The Canter family produces 100% grassfed organic milk.
Tuesday June 9 10:30 am	Andy Mullikin 53280 County Rd. N Wauzeka, WI	Transitioning to organic in the grassfed milk world.
Tuesday June 23 10:30 am	Ryan Studnicka 1435 Blue River Rd. Muscoda, WI	How to extend the grazing season. Stockpiling and limiting the amount of days spent feeding hay. **Note: This event also aims to bring together graziers in the Grant/Iowa County area to form a new pasturewalk group!
Tuesday July 21 10:30 am	Aaron Miller E8477 Octagon Ave. Cashton, WI	Managing the late spring flush and multi-species grazing.
***Saturday** August 29 10:30 am	Don Boland 18732 Hwy 27 Gays Mills, WI	One year review of switching to a once-a-day milking system.
Tuesday Sept. 15 10:30 am	Kelsey Vance E4998 Irish Ridge Rd. Viroqua, WI	Renovating pasture. Grazing under apple trees and multi-species grazing. We will also review what the fallowed corn field looks like after grazing for an entire season.
Tuesday Sept. 29 10:30 am	Jason Klinge 19769 Hwy 13 Farmersburg, IA	Matching stocking rates with forage growth throught the growing season. Managing Canadian Thistle by adjusting rest period.
Tuesday October 13 10:30 am	Christopher Baird 12241 Hwy 27 Ferryville, WI	Tillage considerations when establishing pasture in heavily outwintered areas. Reviewing nutrient management plan and soil samples. Increasing fertility over time with minimal commerical fertilizer

CRAWFORD STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

GrassWorks Inc.

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

Late-Season Wisconsin Field Crop Disease Update

Authored by: Damon Smith, Extension Field Crops Pathologist

Introduction

As Wisconsin's field crop season winds down, several diseases are becoming more noticeable in corn and soybean fields. Now is a good time to scout fields, confirm disease issues, and make harvest plans that help protect yield and crop quality.

Disease Issues to Watch for in Silage Corn

Several leaf diseases are showing up in Wisconsin corn this year, including southern rust, tar spot, gray leaf spot, and northern corn leaf blight. These diseases can reduce silage quality and may weaken corn stalks as plants pull energy from the stalk to fill grain. Weak stalks are more likely to lodge or fall over before harvest.

Leaf diseases can also affect whole-plant moisture levels, making it harder to harvest silage at the ideal moisture. When silage is harvested too dry or too wet, it may not pack well in the bunker or pile. Poor packing can slow fermentation and allow molds and other fungi to continue growing. Over time, this can increase the risk of mold and mycotoxin problems. See my previous article for more in depth information about this issue.

What to Do

- Scout fields now for disease severity.
- Prioritize heavily infected fields for harvest.
- Monitor whole-plant moisture closely to ensure timely chopping.
- Watch for stalk strength issues and lodging risk.

Southern Rust Update

The spread of southern rust has slowed during the past two weeks, largely because of cooler temperatures (Fig. 1). However, the disease has not stopped spreading, and fields should continue to be monitored.

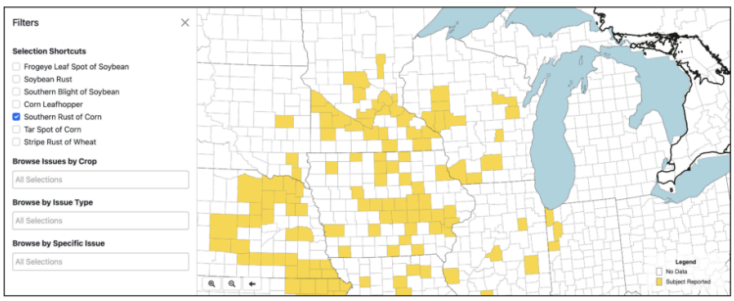


Figure 1. County-level confirmations of southern rust of corn in the Midwest U.S. in 2026. Image from the Crop Protection Network, Crop Lookout Tool. Image captured August 31, 2026.

At this point in the season, fungicide applications are generally not recommended. Instead, focus on harvest planning. Fields with severe southern rust should be harvested before healthier fields to reduce losses from lodging and stalk breakdown.

What to Do

- Continue monitoring affected fields.
- Watch for stalk deterioration and lodging.
- Harvest heavily infected fields first.

Sudden Death Syndrome and Red Crown Rot in Soybeans

We have seen an increase in sudden death syndrome (SDS) in soybean fields this year. In fact, SDS appears to be more widespread than it has been during the past few seasons. While the cases brought to our attention so far have all been confirmed as SDS, growers should take a closer look at affected plants because another disease, red crown rot (RCR), can look very similar. Wisconsin reported its first case of RCR in 2025. Because the symptoms of SDS and RCR are so alike, it is important to carefully dig up plants and examine roots, stems, and crowns to determine which disease is present. Accurate diagnosis is critical because management decisions may differ.

The Crop Protection Network Publication An Overview of Sudden Death Syndrome provides an excellent comparison of SDS and other soybean diseases and can help identify key differences among them.

Why Is SDS More Common This Year?

Weather conditions this season likely favored SDS development. Wisconsin experienced one of its driest Mays on record, followed by an exceptionally wet June. SDS is favored by cool, wet soils shortly after planting. Under these conditions, the fungus infects roots and begins developing early in the season. The earlier the infection starts, the greater the potential impact on soybean yield. However, visible symptoms often do not appear until much later in the season, when toxins produced by the fungus move from the roots into the leaves.

What to Do

Unfortunately, there are no effective in-season treatments for SDS once symptoms appear. However, getting an accurate diagnosis now can help guide future management decisions, including variety selection and field planning. If you are unsure whether a field has SDS, RCR, or another issue, consider submitting a sample to the University of Wisconsin Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic (PDDC) for confirmation

Key Takeaways

- Scout corn fields now for leaf diseases and stalk strength issues.
- Harvest heavily diseased silage and grain fields first.
- Continue monitoring southern rust, even as cooler weather slows its spread.
- Expect to see more SDS symptoms in soybeans this season.
- Confirm soybean disease diagnoses before making future management decisions.
- Report any confirmed RCR field samples.

Submit samples to the PDDC when disease identification is uncertain.





Six Options to Clean Crop Seed and Save Money

Field Fodder: Learn about equipment options and considerations for cleaning your own seed on the farm.

by Sam Bibby

While purchasing certified seed ensures high germination rates, genetic consistency, hybrid vigor and seed cleanliness, many farmers find that cleaning their own seed on the farm offers a cost-effective alternative when legally permitted

Introduction

Saving and cleaning your own seed can be an effective way to lower input costs.
The best seed-cleaning system depends on crop type, contamination issues, desired seed quality and budget. Whether you're looking to remove fines before storage or prepare high-quality seed for planting, selecting the right cleaning equipment is essential.
However, before saving seed, farmers must ensure full compliance with plant variety protection laws, patent regulations, and specific technology or seed-purchase agreements. Many protected varieties strictly prohibit saving seed.
Where legally permitted, however, handling

Rotary Screeners

These are among the most common pieces of seed-cleaning equipment found on grain farms today. They are very affordable based on bushels cleaned per hour.
They work by running grain through a rotating drum made of perforated screen. Smaller trash falls through the screen and is carried away.
These screeners do a great job at cleaning grain prior to market or storage as they are very effective at removing fines in corn that prevent even drying in the bin. Some two-stage models offer the ability to remove larger trash such as cob pieces.
While primarily used for larger grains such as corn, rotary screeners can also be used for small grains, although changing screens can be time-consuming. In many cases, a two-stage model can produce a sample clean enough to be planted with a grain drill.
Certain crops or trash problems cannot be adequately cleaned without using

moving air such as from a fanning mill or aspirator.

Fanning Mills

This is a classic seed cleaner you would expect to find in your grandpa's old granary. They usually contain at least two (sometimes many more) shaking screens to separate large and small trash from the seed.

The screens have options for holes with different shapes and sizes and are easily changed for different crop and trash conditions. After passing over the top screen and through the lower screen, the seed enters a column of air to separate lighter trash from seed.

A traditional model such as the Clipper 1B might clean 15 bushels per hour while a new Clipper 686-2-4 can clean up to 1,000 bushels per hour. Used options exist in between those two extremes that would fit in well on most Midwest farms.

Optical Sorters

One of the most difficult aspects of cleaning seed is dealing with weed seed with similar characteristics to the grain. Many small-seeded specialty crops can suffer from contamination of small broadleaf weed seeds of the same size and weight as the grain.

Optical sorters are the seed cleaner of choice when contaminants cannot be separated effectively by size, shape or density alone. They operate by dropping seed off a short ramp, taking a picture of each seed, analyzing it based on color and shape, and delivering a blast of compressed air to reject any foreign material or weed seeds.

Optical sorters can create very clean samples, but they are generally slow, and the machines are very expensive relative to the amount of bushels cleaned per hour.

Gravity Table

Many operations producing grain for seed or food-grade sales use a gravity table.

A gravity table separates grain based on density. It can remove excessively heavy material such as stones as well as light material such as chaff or damaged grain. Gravity tables are good for removing diseased and light seed to reduce dockage at the elevator or improve germination and overall seed quality.

A gravity table is made up of a perforated oscillating bed that is set with one corner higher than the other. Seed is deposited at one end of the table. Air is blown through the bed to allow the grain to float and separate like a liquid.

Light particles sit on top and flow downward while heavy particles sit on the bottom in contact with the bed, and thus the oscillating motion of the bed pushes them upward away from the light particles.

Gravity tables are usually slower than a fanning mill or rotary cleaner of similar price.

Scalpers & Aspirators

These are often used as pre-cleaners in a larger grain cleaning system.
A scalper usually uses one shaking sieve to remove large impurities, while an aspirator uses blown air to remove light impurities. Using these pre-cleaners ahead of the main machine — whether a fanning mill, gravity table or optical sorter — can improve cleaning efficiency and increase throughput.

Combine Twice

One budget-friendly option that works well is running grain through the combine a second time.
Usually, an auger is set over the feeder house, and the sieves are tightened up compared with harvest. While it may cause slightly more grain damage, the resulting sample is often clean enough for planting with a grain drill, particularly when weed-seed contamination is not a major concern.
For many farms, a fanning mill offers an excellent balance of flexibility, cleaning effectiveness and affordability. Additional equipment such as aspirators, gravity tables or optical sorters can be added to address specific seed-quality challenges as needs evolve.

Sam Bibby is a University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension regional crops educator.

Southern Rust of Corn Continues to Cause Anxiety Across Wisconsin

Authored by: Damon Smith, Extension Field Crops Pathologist

Introduction

We continue to get new corn southern rust (Figure 1) reports and management questions almost daily. Much anxiety exists out there about the continued progress of the disease in the state and if in-season management is needed.

Plant pathologists around the country are watching the situation carefully, especially since 2025 was a banner year for southern rust. Fortunately, the situation in 2026 isn't quite what it was in 2025 for Wisconsin farmers. Like I have mentioned before, it is not time to panic.

You can track current reports using the Crop Protection Network Crop Lookout Tool.

Is Southern Rust New to Wisconsin?

No, I can find southern rust in corn fields just about every year. The difference is, that on average, it shows up in September after yield is determined and at levels that most people don't even notice.

Has the fungus adapted to overwinter in Wisconsin?

No, it has not. Biology doesn't change this fast. The spores of the southern rust fungus must still be blown into Wisconsin from southern states.

Why has southern rust been such a nuisance in 2025 and 2026?

Several factors are contributing to the greater than average severity of southern rust in parts of Wisconsin.

First, there are corn hybrids that are more susceptible to the southern rust pathogen being planted in the state. We don't see complete resistance or immunity to southern rust, but there are hybrids which show good partial resistance, slowing the fungal progression and ending the season with less southern rust than a susceptible hybrid.

Second, the weather over the last several seasons is such that VERY HOT and wet weather systems have been prominent in July which has driven spore movement from southerly states and subsequent infection of corn in Wisconsin. In 2026, it has been clear that the spore movement occurred in July and was driven by weather systems that pulled spores up through Iowa into Minnesota and then to northwest Wisconsin, where the first reports of the disease were made in early August. This is about a month earlier than average in Wisconsin, generating lots of interest and anxiety.

Is the southern rust severity we are seeing in 2026 like that of 2025?

No, the severity at present is less than what we saw by this same time in 2025. Cooler weather in August has meant that the secondary cycles of

the fungus have slowed. The fungus has "southern" in the name for a reason (Quoting Dr. Travis Faske, University of Arkansas). It likes it HOT! Moderate daytime high temperatures and cool (in the 50s) lows at night are NOT conducive for southern rust to move quickly

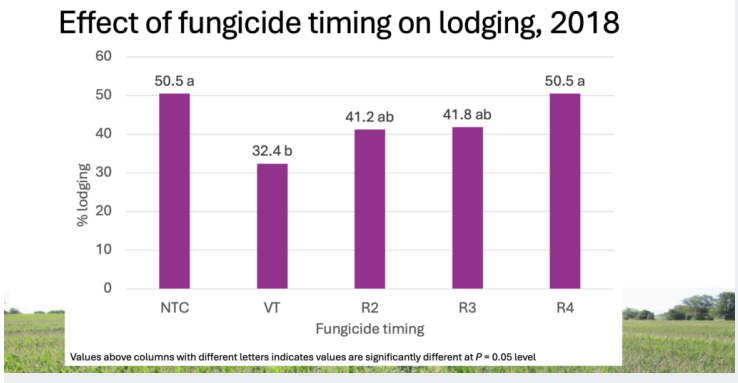
Should I spray a fungicide at the R4 (dough) or R5 (dent) corn growth stages?

No! This is especially true in the current economy of tight margins. As I pointed out in my previous article, the research-based fungicide decision matrix for southern rust clearly states that spraying at R4 is unlikely to provide an economic return and spraying at R5 definitely won't provide an economic return relative to not treating with a fungicide.

Will a fungicide at R4 (dough) or later preserve corn standability?

No, it will not. Several researchers in the southern U.S. have conducted timing of application trials for southern rust and documented lodging/standability scores. Dr. Kiersten Wise at the University of Kentucky shared Figure 2 with me clearly showing one of these trials. In that work an application of fungicide at the R4 growth stage resulted in lodging scores similar to the nontreated control. The best time to control rust AND reduce lodging from the disease is at the VT (tassel) corn growth stage.

Courtesy of Dr. Kiersten Wise, University of Kentucky



What should I do now for southern rust in Wisconsin?

Again, don't panic. Severity of southern rust this season has not been as bad as 2025. Remember, this disease can LOOK very bad but not amount to much yield loss when the combines roll.

Farmers should scout fields and prioritize fields with high southern rust severity to be harvested first. This will help reduce lodging losses. Southern rust does force dry-down to happen more quickly, helping in the prioritization of early harvest for fields with heavy southern rust. Farmers should also get a look at hybrids in various trials near them. Prioritizing the purchase of partially resistant hybrids in 2027 will help to reduce the impact of southern rust in future seasons.

Need Help Identifying Rust?

If you are uncertain whether rust symptoms in your field are southern rust or another disease, samples can be submitted to the University of Wisconsin Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic (PDDC).

Send leaf samples in a sealed plastic bag without added moisture. Information about submitting samples and clinic services is available on the PDDC website.

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WISCONSIN SOYBEAN MARKETING BOARD
Wisconsin CORN



In July 2026, the regulation overseeing pesticide use in Wisconsin, ATCP 29, was updated by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to meet the federal pesticide regulations established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). One of the major changes that applicators need to be aware of is the new minimum age requirements. Prior to the rule change, there were no minimum age requirements for private or commercial certification outlined in ATCP 29. However, there were minimum age requirements for commercial licenses to meet the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) for agricultural employees.

In recent years, the EPA updated federal rules about who can use restricted use pesticides (RUPs), stating a minimum age of 18 years old. To be compliant with federal standards, Wisconsin updated state regulations in ATCP 29. As of July 1st, 2026, anyone seeking certification and/or licensing must meet the minimum age requirement of 18 years old (Table 1).

Type of Certification/License	Minimum Age Prior to July 1st 2026	Minimum Age After July 1st 2026
Private certification	No minimum	18 years of age
Commercial certification	No minimum	
Individual commercial applicator license	16 years of age	
Worker Protection Standard Compliance (Agriculture)	18 years of age	

Table 1: Pesticide certification and licensing requirements in Wisconsin.

Anyone certified and/or licensed prior to these changes who is still under the age of 18 years old will be grandfathered in and will not lose their certification or license.

For questions regarding these changes, contact State of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) or the University of Wisconsin Pesticide Applicator Training Program.



Additional Resources and Information

State of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Email: datcppesticideinfo@wi.gov
Phone: (608) 224-4548

University of Wisconsin Pesticide Applicator Training Program

Email: patprogram@mailplus.wisc.edu
Phone: (608) 262-7588

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Agriculture Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
United States Department of Agriculture
University of Wisconsin-Extension
La Crosse County Offices
212 North 6th Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

100.200.1000



Sam Bibby
Regional Crop Educator
Email: sam.bibby@wisc.edu
Phone: (608)219-2055

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