CORN DISEASE NETWORK

Sept. 4, 2026 — Late but not too late: 2027 tar spot disease management starts now

It's never too late to scout for tar spot, a disease of corn caused by the fungus *Phyllachora maydis* (Figure 1). Just this week, tar spot was reported in four Kansas counties. Three of these counties have not ever seen tar spot in past years.

Tar spot has now been reported in the these Kansas counties in 2026: Edwards (Sept. 4), Saline (Sept. 1), Mitchell (Sept. 1), Riley (Sept. 1), Ottawa (Aug. 26), Clay (Aug. 3), Cloud (July 31), Smith (July 21), Atchison (July 16), Jefferson (July 3), Doniphan (July 3), Jewell (June 29), Marshall (June 25), Nemaha (June 25), Washington (June 19), Republic (June 17) and Brown (June 17) (Figure 2).

Detection at this late stage can be credited to all the agronomists and growers out there still scouting and walking crops as we approach harvest (kudos!).

When it comes to tar spot management, hybrid selection is important. A fungicide application is not needed each year, as weather plays an important role in disease development and fungicide pay-off. Hybrids with higher disease tolerance for tar spot are key in slowing disease pressure and preserving yield. Tolerant hybrids can also save fungicide costs in the long run.

Frequently asked questions about tar spot:

How do I scout for tar spot?

Tar spot develops as small, black, raised spots (circular or oval) that develop on infected plants and may appear on one or both sides of the leaves, leaf sheaths and husks. Spots may be found on healthy (green) and dying (brown) tissue. Tar spot can be easily confused with insect poop, which can appear as black spots on the surface of the leaf (Figure 3).

If you would like assistance in confirming tar spot, you can contact Rodrigo Onofre, your local county Extension office or the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at by clicking here.

What if there is history of tar spot in this field or neighboring fields?

Tar spot overwinters in infested corn residue on the soil surface, providing a source of inoculum for the subsequent growing season. Spores can be dispersed by wind and rain and move to nearby fields if conditions are favorable.

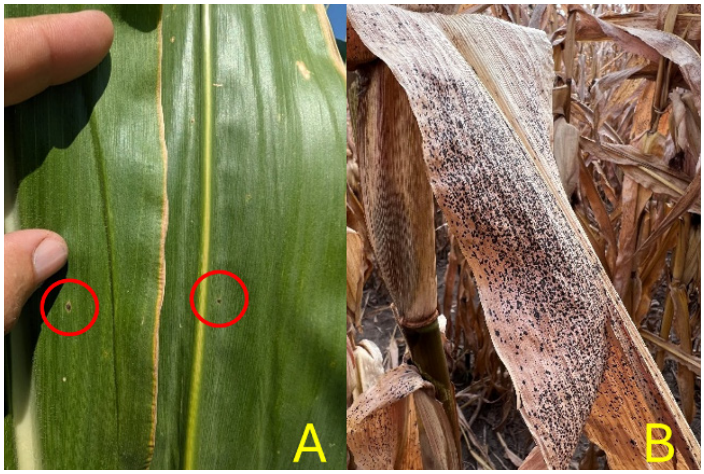

Figure 1. *Tar spot disease at R5 growth stage (A) and pre-harvest (B). Photo courtesy of Rodrigo Onofre, Ph.D., K-State Plant Pathology.*

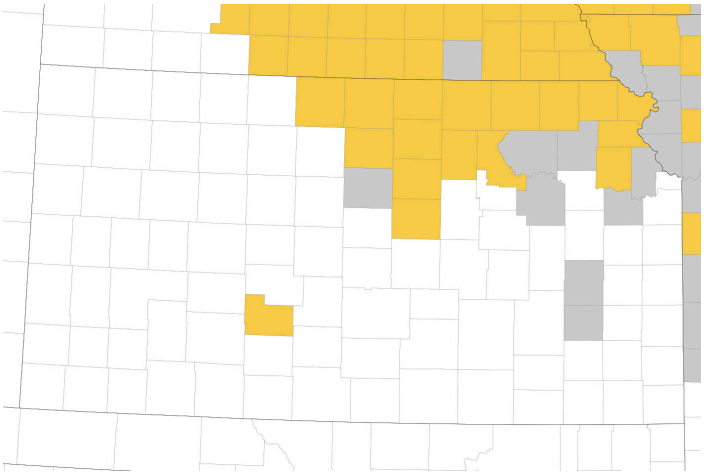

Figure 2. *Tar spot (*Phyllachora maydis*) in Kansas as of Sept. 4, 2026. Source: kscorn.com/corndisease.*

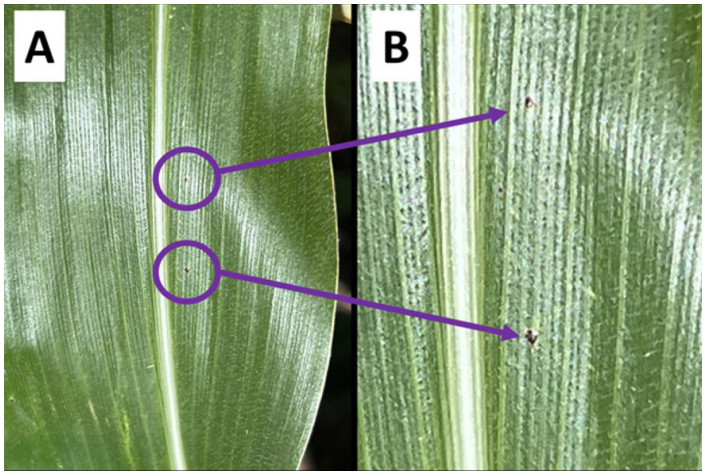

Figure 3. *Example of tar spot (A) and a close-up on the tar spot lesions (B). Photo courtesy of Rodrigo Onofre, Ph.D., K-State Plant Pathology.*

KANSAS CORN

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When and where was tar spot reported in Kansas during the 2025 corn season?

In the 2025 season, tar spot was confirmed in Doniphan (June), Brown (June), Jefferson (June), Atchison (July), Jackson (July), Republic (July), Marshall (July), Washington (July), Lincoln (October), and Smith (October) counties. Overall, tar spot severity was low in 2025. However, some growers in the northeast part of Kansas reported severe yield impact.

At what growth stage can I apply fungicide?

Research has shown that making an application just after first detection and at or after VT is effective if lesions are detected early. If you wait until there is significant disease in the upper canopy, then a fungicide application may be too late. A guide to determining corn growth stages is available here.

How does moisture influence disease development?

The recent rains and lower temperatures likely helped to promote tar spot development. Additionally, irrigated corn may be particularly at high risk of yield or silage loss. Forecasted rainfall and high humidity will favor the development and spread of tar spot.

Should I apply a fungicide?

Fungicides are an effective tool for controlling tar spot if they are timed properly. Research has shown that the best return on investment from a fungicide application on corn occurs when fungal diseases are active in the corn canopy. A well-timed fungicide application will be important to reduce disease severity. We recommend holding off until the disease is active in your field and corn is at least the V10 growth stage. Scouting will be especially important if wet weather continues.

Several fungicides are highly effective at controlling tar spot when applied from VT to R3. Pick a product with multiple modes of action. The National Corn Disease Working Group has compiled efficacy ratings for fungicides labeled for tar spot control, available at the Crop Protection Network website here.

If there is high disease pressure early in the season, a second application may be warranted. Fields should be scouted 14-21 days after the first application to determine whether tar spot has become active again. Fungicides will not provide benefits after R5. Always consult fungicide labels for any use restrictions prior to application.

Where has tar spot been reported in the 2026 season?

In cooperation with K-State Plant Pathology Department, the Kansas Corn Commission has developed an online Corn Disease Network (kscorn.com/corn-disease) to help corn growers identify what diseases to watch for in their geographic area. Tar spot has now been confirmed in 17 Kansas counties: Edwards, Saline, Mitchell, Riley, Ottawa, Clay, Cloud, Smith, Atchison, Jefferson, Doniphan, Jewell, Marshall, Nemaha, Washington, Republic and Brown (Figure 2).

Help Us Track Tar Spot

If you suspect a field has tar spot, contact Rodrigo Onofre directly and/or submit a sample to the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab using the sheet linked here. This will help us monitor the situation in the state.

Rodrigo Borba Onofre, Ph.D.
Extension Row Crop Plant Pathologist
785-477-0171
onofre@ksu.edu