

Is your corn rusty?

By: Mike Hunter

When corn silage harvest gets underway, you may notice rusty looking corn. This rusty appearance on the corn leaves is a disease called Common Rust. The symptoms appear as reddish brown blister-like formations, called pustules, on the plant. Common rust of corn is mainly found on the leaves of the corn plant.

Common rust is caused by a fungus called *Puccinia sorghi*. Common rust usually appears after silking takes place but this year it showed up earlier than expected. The development of common rust is favored by high humidity with nighttime temperatures of 65-70° F and moderate daytime temperatures.

The disease cannot overwinter in the northern climates. It spreads northward by wind-borne spores from the south. The fungus cannot survive on crop residue so cultural practices will not influence the development of this disease.

Most field corn hybrids have very good resistance to common rust. Common rust of corn has not been shown to cause economic yield losses in New York; therefore, applying fungicides for control would not be a profitable decision.

The light to moderate rust infested corn fields will raise questions about the corn silage quality and potential animal risks associated with feeding rust-infected silage. There are no known toxic effects from feeding rust-infected corn silage, nor will it reduce palatability. Information from Iowa State University indicates that when the corn is ensiled, the ensiling process creates enough heat and acids to kill the fungus and detoxify the forage. The sugars and other byproducts that are produced during the ensiling process should overwhelm any unpalatable tastes that the rust may cause.

Common rust might be present in your corn fields this year. Fortunately, it is a corn disease of minor economic importance in New York and is not expected to have any negative impact on forage quality. We will continue to rely on resistant corn hybrids to keep this disease in check. If you would like any more information about common rust of corn or other corn diseases contact Mike Hunter (315)788-8450 or Kitty O'Neil (315)854-1218.