

# Midwest Farmowner

News & Information from First Mid Ag Services

Fall 2021 – Vol. 29, No. 3

## Tar Spot Presents as New Threat to Corn Yields

The 2021 growing season was a rollercoaster of ups and downs for much of Illinois. From late season snowfall in April, to excessive rainfall in June and July, to dry conditions in August, crop yields were heavily influenced by the effects of the weather.

Summer wet weather opened the door for several leaf diseases in corn, all of which negatively affected yield. One relatively new corn disease in the Midwest is tar spot. It was first identified in Central America in 1904 but not documented in the Midwest until 2015. First Mid farm managers first observed tar spot late in the 2020 season, but yield losses were low because the corn crop was infected late in the season. That was not the case in 2021.

Cool, rainy June and July days provided perfect conditions for disease development. Tar spot effects on plant health and yield were worse because infection came before the corn tasseled. Such early infections cause premature plant death and can shorten the grain fill period, resulting in smaller kernels. Yield losses can be as high as 70 bushels per acre, depending on severity and timing. Yield losses of 20-50 bushels were common this year in Central Illinois.

Tar spot is caused by the fungus, *Phyllachora maydis*, which overwinters on corn residue. Spores spread from residue on the soil to corn plants by rain, wind and irrigation. The pathogen thrives at 60-70 degrees, 75% relative humidity and seven hours or more of leaf wetness. Spores can infect plants any time during the growing season if environmental conditions are right.

Tar spot is identified by the abundant raised, black lesions on the surface of the corn leaf, giving the appearance of tar splatters. Lesions are sometimes surrounded by yellow halos, creating the look of a “fisheye” on the leaf surface. Symptoms do not appear until 14-21 days after infection which complicates control measures. And tar spot infection is believed to make corn plants more susceptible to diseases such as gray leaf spot and Southern rust.

Since the pathogen is relatively new, control methods are not completely understood. Prior to planting, crop rotation and tillage can



*Tar spot has established itself in the Midwest and is expected to cause problems for corn growers for the foreseeable future. Ask your First Mid Ag Services farm manager for advice on how best to control this relatively new corn disease.*

help prevent initial infection. Fungicides may suppress infection, but multiple applications may be required. Since visual symptoms are delayed, application timing should be made with residue and environmental factors in mind.

Selecting corn hybrids with tar spot resistance is the best control, but hybrids appropriate for the Midwest have not been bred for resistance yet. Seed companies are evaluating the most resistant hybrids, but it may be several years for the right genetics to become available.

Tar spot could cause problems for the foreseeable future. First Mid farm managers will keep current on developments and controls to help manage tar spot and other diseases in 2022 and beyond. Contact Tyler Roth in Bloomington at 309-665-0958, [troth@firstmid.com](mailto:troth@firstmid.com), or Tom Hill in Springfield at 217-547-2885, [thill@firstmid.com](mailto:thill@firstmid.com), for more information. MF

Inside: Kankakee Retirement Transitions Farm Management Responsibilities



### Fall Brings Personnel Changes in First Mid Kankakee Office



John Tammen

After 35 years of service to First Mid Ag Services and predecessors, John Tammen, vice president and regional manager in the Kankakee Office, announced his plan to “officially” retire at the end of August. However, he remains active with the company, managing a reduced number of farm accounts through the remainder of the calendar year.

“John’s plan for retirement gave us time to hire Ashten Masching in June to meet our future staffing needs. This allows a smooth transition for John’s landowners as management duties are transferred to other farm managers in the office over a six-month timeframe,” says First Mid Ag Services President Brian Thompson. “John will also remain the Illinois and Indiana Real Estate Managing Broker for the Kankakee Office, assisting in sales and acquisitions.”

During his career, Tammen developed many personal relationships with his clients, even being told by several that he was not allowed to retire. He plans to help make the transition with his clients and First Mid farm management staff as smooth as possible and continue the high level of service that all have come to expect.

Joe Richie has been promoted to regional manager in Kankakee. Richie was born and raised in rural Livingston County and grew up working in the family-owned fertilizer business. He graduated from Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a bachelor’s degree in agribusiness economics in 2003. He previously worked as an ag/commercial lender for 15 years, the last three with First Mid Bank. Richie graduated from the Community Bankers School in July 2011 and the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin in August 2016. He received his Illinois Real Estate Broker license in October 2019.

“My main goal was to leave this department in as good, if not a better, position as when I took over five and a half years ago,” says Tammen. “Having accomplished that goal, Joe has the ability, the staff and the tools to accomplish much more in the future for our clients.”

Joe Richie can be reached at 815-936-8973 or [jrichie@firstmid.com](mailto:jrichie@firstmid.com). MF



Joe Richie

### Ashten Masching Assumes New Farm Manager Role in Kankakee



Ashten Masching

Ashten Masching recently joined the farm management staff in the Kankakee Office. She was raised in Livingston County on her family’s farm near Cabery, Illinois. While living on the farm, she gained experience with beef cattle and her family’s row crop operation.

Masching was involved with many different ag organizations at Illinois State University. She graduated in 2019 with a bachelor’s degree in agribusiness and agronomy management.

Prior to joining First Mid Ag Services, Masching worked for FS Grain LLC in Kankakee, where she was a grain originator in direct contact with customers. She assisted them with risk management decisions, including making grain plans and sales throughout the year.

Masching is currently enrolled in coursework to become a Licensed Real Estate Broker. In her free time, she still enjoys helping on the family farm and being outdoors. She can be reached at 815-936-8975 or [amasching@firstmid.com](mailto:amasching@firstmid.com). MF



### Justin Wheeler Obtains AFM Designation and Auctioneer's License

First Mid Ag Services is dedicated to the training and education that empowers farm managers to meet client needs. Justin Wheeler, based in Decatur, doubled down in 2021, obtaining his Accredited Farm Manager (AFM) designation and Illinois Auctioneer's License.

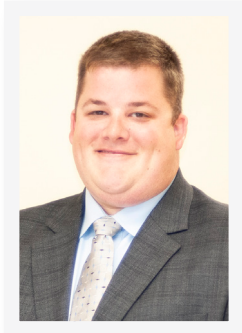
The AFM designation represents a multi-year commitment with the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, the largest professional association for rural property land experts. The designation symbolizes passing ag land management courses, a comprehensive exam, and the successful design of an intricate farm plan encompassing budgeting, financials, cropping, environmental impacts and property management.

Wheeler passed his auctioneer's exam in September and will operate under the leadership of Managing Real Estate Broker David Klein. He is involved in advancing First Mid's online auctions and capabilities. Contact him at 217-421-9615 or [jwheeler@firstmid.com](mailto:jwheeler@firstmid.com). MF



Justin Wheeler

### Mattoon Office Expands Staff with Addition of Brock Norris



Brock Norris

The Mattoon office recently expanded its staff to accommodate farm management clients, adding Brock Norris as a new face in June 2021. Norris joins First Mid Ag Services as an assistant vice president/farm manager. He also is a licensed Illinois Real Estate Broker.

Norris grew up on a grain and livestock farm in Moultrie County, where he was active in FFA and 4-H. He is a 2016 graduate of Illinois State University with a bachelor's degree in agriculture business and agronomy management. Prior to joining First Mid, Norris worked as a crop consultant for an area ag retailer. He also spent time as a research agronomist, working with one of the industry's largest seed suppliers. Norris' experiences on the farm, as well as his work in ag retail and research give him a well-rounded perspective to farm management.

In his free time, Norris enjoys watching St. Louis Cardinals baseball and shooting trap. He resides in Sullivan, Illinois, with his wife, Lauren. MF

### Trust in First Mid Leads to Fruitful Farm Sales for Brothers

The decision to sell family farm ground is not always an easy one. It can be an emotional, as well as transactional, journey. For brothers George and Tom Fry, they found that trust was the top trait they wanted from a real estate broker who could navigate them through the process.

"One of the things that was important to me was to have someone I could trust, especially since I live a long way from the farms," says George Fry, who lives in Louisville, Kentucky. Brother Tom lives in Bloomington, Illinois. "The decision to sell was hard. We may always wonder if we did the right thing, but I cannot think of a better customer experience than deciding to work with First Mid Ag Services."

The Frys inherited two farms from their mother's trust earlier this year; one in Woodford County and one in McLean County. Since neither George nor Tom farm, they decided to sell.

"When my brother asked me to coordinate the sale, I was concerned because of my lack of knowledge and experience. Several people recommended First Mid, and I was put in touch with David Klein," says Fry. "After talking to him mostly over the phone, I felt he was someone I could trust. That confidence grew with every contact. He was a very good listener."

Together with Tyler Roth from First Mid's Bloomington Office, Klein walked the Frys through all of the options available to them to sell the two farms. Through the education process, Fry says communication with First Mid was always timely and very clear.

"David and Tyler were phenomenal. They always had answers and explained everything well," says Fry. "They let us decide what to do and did not pressure us."

The brothers ultimately chose to forego an auction and sell the Woodford County farm to the current tenant and the McLean County farm to the tenant's son.

"Our mother had a good relationship with the tenants, and we wanted to honor that. Tom and I realize an auction or competitive sale might have yielded a higher return for us and for First Mid, but David and Tyler never pressured us. They respectfully accepted our decision."

In recommending First Mid, Fry stresses the real estate team is very knowledgeable, fair and honest. "I am very pleased with the results and truly thankful for their help," he says. MF



Photo by United Soybean Board

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