Dryland Foot Rot

My first experience with Fusarium foot rot was a real “eye-opener.” I was harvesting a wheat crop that looked like would make 55 bushels per acre, easily. As I was cutting, I kept looking back at the bulk tank – the grain wasn’t pouring in like I thought it should and trucks were not being loaded as quickly as I would have liked. The field yielded 28 bushels per acre.

Fusarium foot rot (also known as dryland foot rot) is caused by fungi that live on residue found either on or just below the soil surface. Fusarium fungi infect roots and/or crowns of wheat, barley, and oats. The lower stems of infected plants often are a chocolate-brown color. “White heads” are sometimes noticed. Yield reductions can be significant. Yield-liming Fusarium infections usually occur when soil moisture is inadequate. The “buildup” of soil N levels in the soil profile during periods of drought also contributes to the problem. Banding of fertilizer P below the seed can offset yield reductions to a limited extent.