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Mystery Crop Damage Threatens Hundreds Of Acres

Shaun Chaiyabhat

6:21 PM CDT, June 1, 2010



FAST FACTS:

- Small dots appear to "burn" through leaves
- Area affected is along Tipton and Shelby County line
- Farmers afraid they may lose their entire crop

(Memphis 6/1/2010) A mystery is unfolding across MidSouth farms.

Something is killing crops, trees, even weeds and nobody can explain why.

Farmers are scratching their heads and some are worried their crops may be lost to the mysterious plague.

It's happening along a large swath of land near the Shelby and Tipton county border along Herring Hill Road and elsewhere near the Mississippi River bottoms.

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Tiny dots appear to have burned onto leaves of all types of plants, and they appear different depending on the plant.

On corn stalks, the dots seem to turn white in the center.

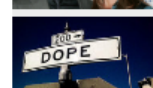
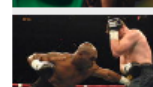
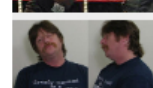
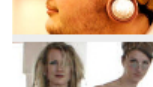
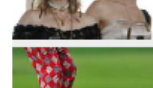
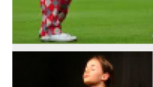
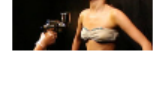
On other plants, a white dust speckles the leaves and then destroys the green life underneath.

"We found it all in the herbs, in the flowers, in the plum tree, in the weeds," said organic farmer Toni Holt. "It's apparently in everything."

Holt grows organic produce that she sells at area farmers' markets.

As she and other farmers inspect the new growth covered in the perplexing plague, they fear their entire crop may be lost.

Less than ten miles from Holt's crops, the damage could possibly hit hundreds of acres of corn at Wilder

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Farms.

It appears to have hit everything in its path.

There does not seem to be anything in common with the affected plants.

The Holts raise organic crops, so they don't spray pesticides on any of their fruits and vegetables.

The first thought among some was a new parasite or insect caused the damage, but Wilder farms sprays pesticides and the damage there is exactly the same.

Farmers first noticed the damaging dots over the weekend.

Then Holt came home to find baby birds dead in their nests.

"There are two dead birds hanging out of two different bird houses, so we're concerned about that. We don't know if it's related, but it's alarming," said Holt. "We've got horses, we're concerned about the horses on the grass. We've got chickens. We sell our eggs at the market."

Farmers we spoke with are convinced something in the air caused this damage.

They're asking the USDA and other experts to look into the problem, and so are we.

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