Black Point in Durum
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The recent rains that we have experienced may make durum more susceptible to black point. Black point, also known as kernel smudge, can be caused by over 100 species of fungi, but usually by *Alternaria*. This disease can affect barley and common wheat, but is primarily a problem of durum. The fungi and spores from black point cause a darkening of the kernel and a characteristic black area on the germ end of the kernel. Black point lowers the quality of the grain due to black specks that cannot be separated from semolina and end up in the pasta. Blackened kernels are considered damaged, and less than 2% damaged kernels are required for a grade of US No 1. This disease usually does not affect grain yield. Black point is favored by high humidity and rain between flowering and soft dough. High levels of nitrogen fertilization, excessive late season irrigation, and lodging can predispose the crop to black point. Some differences in resistance to this disease occur in durum varieties, but no variety is known to be completely resistant to black point. Fungicide application to protect the seed head during grain fill is usually not economical. Black point can be partially controlled by reducing nitrogen rates and avoiding excessive late season irrigation.

*Durum wheat kernels affected by black point (right).*
Photo by Jack Kelly Clark (Univ. California).

Reference and source material