

It's a Black and White Issue

I am writing this immediately following the IFA-FAO Agriculture Conference, *Global Food Security and the Role of Sustainable Fertilization*, held in Rome, Italy, in March, 2003. The experts selected to address a wide range of scientific and policy issues that constrain...or may improve...fertilizer use, clearly made the point that **fertilizers are essential to food security**. It's as clear cut, *as black and white an issue*, as that.

I hope you are asking yourself: "If it is so clear cut, why then are so many still suffering from insufficient food or inadequate diets?" As clear as the fertilizer/food security issue is, the means for achieving it is much less obvious. I think the Conference made great strides in helping resolve thinking and thereby the opportunity for progress by elucidating:

- Transforming research into knowledge about soils and fertilizer management as well as providing technologies appropriate for the education and economic status of recipient farmers.
- Sustainable development of food production systems is reliant upon maximum productivity.
- Use of existing knowledge is often constrained by either lack of or misguided political will...and policy to make it happen.

If policy is indeed the bottleneck to food security, it was pointed out that we too often pick the wrong issues or policy to attack. A part of what I heard was that: *It isn't* policies to subsidize agriculture in developed countries that retard developing country agriculture. *It is* policies and decisions to exclude new and helpful technologies (such as genetically modified crops). *It isn't* a one-size-fits-all approach to food production that works. *It is* the expectation of industry investment before reasonable economic stability exists. *It is* the lack of financial structures and physical infrastructure that constrains and retards progress.

Although there are competing interests for support, the Conference made a bold and hopefully effective attempt in building common understanding—and the underpinning perspective—that 'it' will only happen through partnership. The readers of *Better Crops International* are instruments in resolving food security, mostly as researchers and educators. I challenge you to learn the real issues, avoid politically correct solutions. You are part of the solution for resolving the chronic state of world food insecurity. You know *it's as black and white an issue as this: Fertilizers are essential for food security*. Partnerships and progressive policies aimed at securing a sustainable food supply are needed. It's as clear cut, *as black and white an issue*, as that.

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