

## *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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