

# A Search For 'True Security'

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sources, and public health.

The current state of world affairs and our dependence on oil for growing and distributing food add up to profound insecurity in our food system, according to Ritchie.

"For me, this question of security has become central, has become one of the dominant questions in everyday life," he said. "We know now how the international oil industry is so central to the destabilization of our personal and national security."

The movement toward a war with the large oil-producing country Iraq "brings the food dependency on oil front and center," said Ritchie.

Most U.S. food production depends on petroleum-based chemicals and diesel fuel. Transporting food over long distances also requires large quantities of fuel.

"All these things make our food security completely entwined with oil," Ritchie said.

Ritchie compared the current U.S. food system to that of the ancient Roman Empire, during the period of time when a thriving population of small-scale, "yeoman" farmers were being displaced by a shift toward consolidated grain production run by large landowners.

The Roman Empire was built by these small farmers, who had their own security, and were devoted to the state, according to Ritchie. But the shift toward centralized food production and the subsequent lowering of grain prices drove these farmers out of business and brought about a "bread and circus" policy. During this era, masses were fed to a minimal degree and their minds were kept occupied by circuses, Ritchie said.

"This eventually weakened the Roman Empire and allowed outside forces to crush and destroy it."

The U.S. has entered a similar state of vulnerability, Ritchie said, in large part because of the industrialization and consolidation of our oil-dependent food system.

"It's clear today, if you destroy your small farmers and your food security inside a great nation, you will weaken yourself to the point that you will invite and be vulnerable to outside attack."

Repeated low prices for milk, grain, and other farm products have caused many farmers to lose faith in their ability to provide a secure livelihood for themselves and their children.

"Panic is a very good descrip-



PASA conference participants enjoyed a lunch prepared from Pennsylvania-grown products.

tion of what happens when year after year, harvest after harvest, the price you receive is below your cost of production," Ritchie said.

True food security will have to depend on thriving independent growers, processors, and marketers, according to Ritchie.

"We need local control, we need local energy... we need local food supplies."

A shift in that direction is al-

ready taking place, Ritchie said. He described "a movement of farmers moving toward sustainability" — individuals and groups like PASA who are engaged in running farms, food-processing facilities, and local food distribution groups that are profitable, support the community, and take care of the environment priorities Ritchie called the "triple-bottom line" of a sustainable food system.

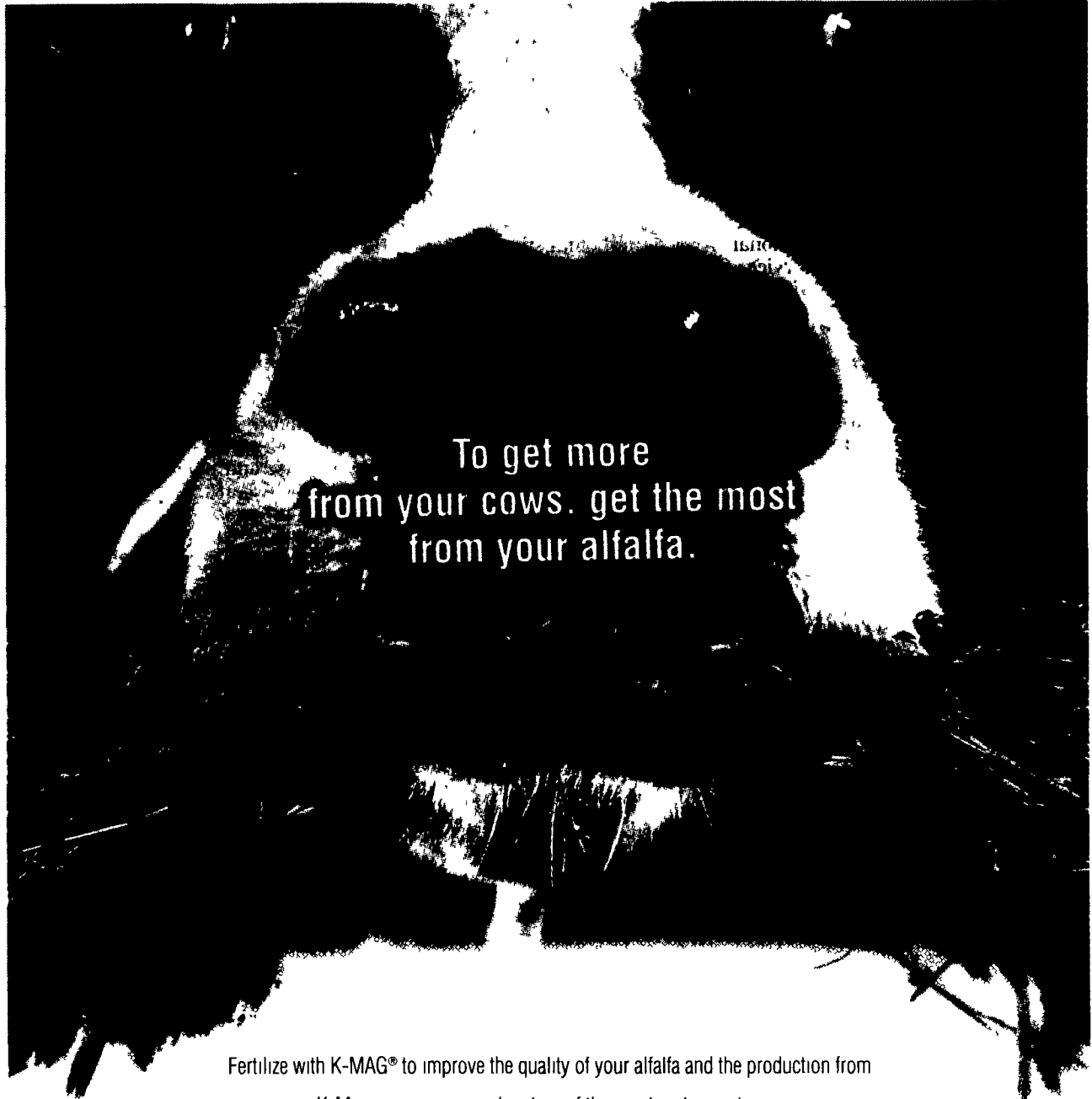
"PASA is part of a much larger movement," he said.

In addition to farm-based groups across the country, a number of larger companies "have also begun to think about this triple-bottom line," Ritchie said. He gave the example of Cargill-Dow, an international corporation working on a biodegradable plastic made from non-

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Tim Bowser, left, accepts the PASA Sustainable Ag Leader Award from board member Lee Beitz. PASA President Kim Miller looks on.




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