

Changes in food system needed, rural Catholic conference told

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. (CNS) — Mike Callicrate is a straight-talking plainsman with a blunt, hard message: Your food is killing you, and your food system is killing your community and nation.

Callicrate, a cattle rancher from St. Francis in the northwest corner of Kansas, was one of the keynote speakers at the National Catholic Rural Life Conference's annual meeting Nov. 10-11 in Overland Park. About 100 people attended, including farmers and ranchers, advocates, food industry professionals, and workers in Catholic social justice and rural life ministries.

The theme of the event was sustainable food, business and agriculture.

“Our food is killing us, literally,” Callicrate, a member of St. Francis Parish, said in an interview after his address. “The industrial model of food production that has been forced upon us has given us food that is very unhealthy.”

It's not just the food — loaded with chemicals and hormones, and produced in unhealthy ways — with which Callicrate has problems. He also doesn't like what the industrial model of food production is doing to society.

“The model of the industry — the industrial model, the business model — is very, very abusive,” he told *The Leaven*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Kansas City. “It concentrates power and wealth in the hands of a very few, which has always been a serious threat to human societies throughout time, and is now unprecedented.