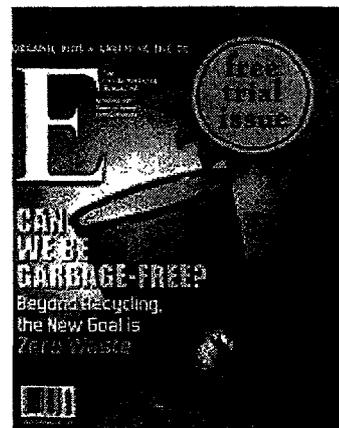
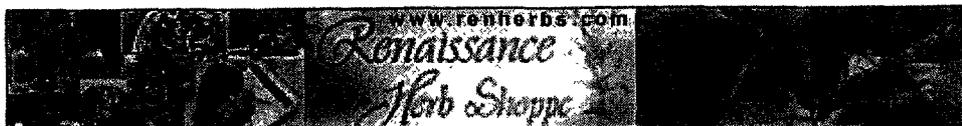




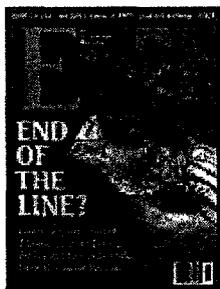
CLICK HERE TO ORDER A  
FREE TRIAL ISSUE  
OF E MAGAZINE!



Donate Now

Search

CURRENT ISSUE ARCHIVE SUBSCRIBE CALENDAR **ECO-LINKS** ADVERTISE MARKETPLACE ABOUT E



Volume VII, Number IV  
July-August 1996

**SIDEBAR**  
**The Rendering Industry**  
**Big Business in By-Products**  
*By Kieran Mulvaney*

Every summer through most of the 1980s, an awful smell wafted its way across the west side of Bridgeport, Connecticut--a stench ultimately traced to the premises of Herman Isaacs, Inc. Once you knew how the long-established company did business, it wasn't surprising to learn that its operations stunk to high heaven. Isaacs, now closed, was a meat rendering plant; it bought spoiled meat scraps, animal carcasses, and other "offal" and transformed this waste product into an inoffensive, high-protein base for such products as designer soaps, medicines, candy (yes, candy) and a whole lot of other things you'd never suspect had meat in them.

**CONTACTS**

**The Center for Media and Democracy**  
3318 Gregory Street  
Madison, WI 53711  
Tel: (608) 233-3346

On a visit to Isaacs 10 years ago, I watched as the plant manager (second generation in the business) calmly consumed Dunkin Donuts and coffee mere feet from a truck trailer crammed to the back doors with rotten meat. It was July, the truck was unrefrigerated, and the meat, which had been sitting there for a week, was already "off" when it was picked up. The smell was indescribable. Inside the plant, I had a personal vision of hell watching workers toiling away in withering heat as rivers of animal fat flowed by their heads.

Rendering is not a high-profile industry: Plant managers shun publicity, and guided tours aren't regularly offered, but rendering is a fact of life for all meat producers. "We use everything but the squeal, the cluck and the moo," says Dr. Raymond Burns of the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

Rendered cow products are used in a wide variety of consumer goods. As *The Wall Street Journal* put it, "Processed cow fats are sometimes used to make cookies and salty snacks taste rich and to make lipsticks glide smoothly. Cow proteins show up in shampoo. Collagen, extracted from the inner layer of cattle hide, is used to balm wounds and cosmetically puff up lips. Gelatin, refined from cattle hide and bones, is found in such foods as ice cream, gummy candies and marshmallows--as well as the capsules encasing drugs."

There's more: Cow lips are bought by Mexico for use in taco filling; cow hearts are used in Russian sausage; cow tracheas, femurs and kidneys are ground up for use in pet food; cow gallstones become Chinese aphrodisiacs; and tails become oxtail soup.

Mad cow disease hasn't yet caused much anxiety in the U.S., because meat producers assert that the disease will remain on the other side of the Atlantic. And most

Americans remain unaware that rendering even exists, let alone that the products of it are a vital ingredient in many of the things they buy. But there's considerable concern in Europe, where consumers are demanding that supermarkets label goods that contain meat by-products. One large chain, Tesco PLC, has already agreed to do that.

The European Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association has also been forced to issue press releases reassuring the public. The association claims that none of the cow organs believed to carry mad cow disease (including the brain, eye and nervous system) are used in its products. Even so, British makers of gelatin (refined from cow bones and hooves) are finding their product banned in food products. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows the import of British gelatin for pharmaceutical use, but does impose some restrictions on the use of rendered materials in cosmetics and food supplements.

Since there's nothing new about rendering, why has mad cow disease asserted itself now? There's no clear answer to that, but the *Harvard Health Letter* reports that, until the late 1970s, rendering plants used high temperatures to remove fat from animal carcasses. The new low-temperature process results in a high-quality product, with lower energy costs. It also, says *New Scientist*, keeps animal diseases alive and well.

If there is a mad cow outbreak in the U.S., the rendering industry will finally get the scrutiny it deserves. Failing that, it will be business as usual. In Texas, agribusiness officials reacted to the bad news from Britain by organizing a cookout and inviting reporters to try the smoked brisket.

[CURRENT ISSUE](#) [ARCHIVE](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#) [CALENDAR](#) [ECO-LINKS](#) [ADVERTISE](#) [MARKETPLACE](#) [ABOUT E](#)

EMAGAZINE.COM

A Service of E/The Environmental Magazine. Copyright © 2003. All Rights Reserved.