

The Martha's Vineyard Times

Film : Slow Food Martha's Vineyard and M.V. Film Festival team up

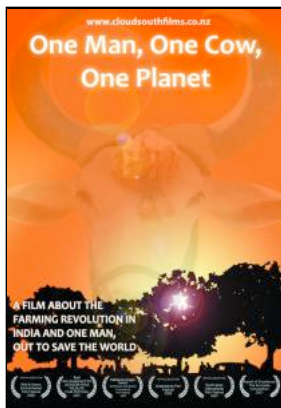
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Add "biodynamic agriculture" to your list of must-know terms. Thanks to the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival (MVFF), Islanders can learn about this approach to farming from the documentary "One Man, One Cow, One Planet," screening Saturday, Jan. 8, at the Chilmark Community Center.



Opening the New Year with a tripleheader, MVFF will begin with a program of animated and live-action shorts for children as part of their winter series, Family. Film. Feast. Slow Food Martha's Vineyard will offer a locally inspired Indian menu, prepared by Cathy Walthers, Jan Buhrman, and Robert Lionette, between the two film events.

Directed by Canadian-born director Thomas Burstyn, "One Man, One Cow, One Planet" makes especially important viewing for anyone concerned about the global agricultural model that relies on chemicals and gene-altered seeds. The film focuses on the work of New Zealand agronomist Peter Proctor with rural farmers in India. Considered the father of modern biodynamic agriculture, Mr. Proctor now lives in India, where farmers relied on biodynamic farming for centuries before the rise of multi-national industrial complexes like Monsanto, the world's leading producer of the herbicide known as Roundup.

After a 2006 agreement between India's prime minister and then-president George W.

Bush, Indian farmers began using genetically altered seed. Yet 60 percent of farmers have failed to recoup their investment, according to the documentary, narrated by American actor Peter Coyote.

The potent message "One Man, One Cow, One Planet" delivers is that soil is a living entity. Not only does the diminished seed variety brought about by genetic alteration in the name of greater crop production prove harmful, but combined with the use of crop-boosting chemicals, it actually kills the soil. Mr. Proctor hopes to revolutionize farming practices worldwide not by battling the multi-national agricultural complexes head-on. Instead he wants to bring about change one farmer at a time.

Composting creates the cornerstone of biodynamic farming. In India, where most of the population considers cows sacred, farmers use cowpat pits to increase the richness of their soils. One interesting fact the movie brings out is that fresh cow dung can actually sterilize a human cut.

In India, cow horns also play an important role in soil preparation, along with natural herb and mineral mixes. Filled with dung from a lactating cow and buried for six months, the horns help restore depleted soil.

Indian farmers employ simple techniques to increase the capacity of water to help grow plants. Birds, insects, worms, and planting calendars all contribute to the process.

Committed to a "locavore" model, these farmers feed their families and workers first, then sell the surplus at roadside stands. With support from other local farmers and the government, Indian crops suffer less erosion, use less water, and are more disease resistant than those fortified with chemicals.

Neither agribusiness nor the impoverished millions in India's cities get their say in "One Man, One Cow, One Planet," but it offers a model for those who would like to help keep our planet and its people healthy. A discussion will follow the one-hour film.

Cinema Circus

Eight shorts for children make up the Cinema Circus program that precedes "One Man, One Cow, One Planet." My pick for the most charming of these films is "The Most Wonderful Egg in the World," a fairy tale about difference, where a king's hens compete to produce the best egg.

"Sleeping Betty" offers a close second by giving a new twist to the over-Disneyfied classic story. The most unusual of the shorts is "City Paradise," a Japanese entry about a long-legged young woman with a red suitcase who visits New York. "At Home with Mrs. Hen" visits a chicken family to comic effect, while "Shhh" watches a boy explore his imaginary powers in a visit to the library with his granddad.

With Allen Farm just down the road, "Charlie Needs a Cloak," about how sheep's wool turns into clothing, seems a particularly apt choice for young children. "Bird on a Wire"

improvises on the interaction between a sly bird and a boy on a park bench, and "Pearl" uses animation to demonstrate what an imaginative knitter can produce.

MVFF family members will get free tickets to the evening's films. The family membership includes half-price rates for Cinema Circus events, the March film festival, and summer film series. In addition, members receive access to films in MVFF's lending library at its office above the Chilmark Tavern.

Cinema Circus, Saturday, Jan. 8, 5 pm, Chilmark Community Center. \$10; \$5 for children; free for members.

Slow Food Martha's Vineyard menu of local foods, 7:15–8:15 pm. BYOB and place settings. \$25; \$20 for Slow Food members.

"One Man, One Cow, One Planet," 8:30 pm. \$10; free for MVFF members. For more information, visit tmvff.org and slowfoodmartha'svineyard.org.

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