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AMERICAN FARM DVD SLATED FOR WIDER RELEASE FEB. 19th Special Collector's Edition Reaches Netflix, Other National Venues

Independent filmmaker James Spione has announced a new distribution deal that will bring his critically acclaimed movie *American Farm* to Netflix as well as other national retail outlets. Mr. Spione's poignant documentary, which premiered theatrically in Cooperstown, New York and went on to attract large theatrical audiences from the Berkshires to the Midwest, will be released on February 19th through New Jersey-based DVD distributor [Passion River Films](#).

An exploration of his family's five-generation struggle to hold onto a small dairy farm in central New York State, *American Farm* is a heartfelt elegy for a vanishing way of life. While fans of Mr. Spione's touching first feature film will be happy to see it again in its original form, this Collector's Edition DVD will also feature more than a dozen additional sequences, many of them shot especially for home video release, that have never been seen in theatres.

"As I spoke with audiences across the country," said Mr. Spione in a recent interview, "I found that people often asked me the same questions after screenings. 'What was the fate of *Contour Meadows*? What happened to the Ames clan?' Audiences really seemed to care about my family, and I was touched by that." With the future of the farm still in question, Spione returned to Richfield a year after the original film was completed and started interviewing the family again to follow up on the story.

The director's efforts have resulted in an unusually rich DVD experience that elaborates and expands upon his original movie. Included is a quietly moving sequence that details farmer Langdon Ames selling his herd of dairy cows, finally letting go of a 150-year family tradition of producing milk on the farm. Mr. Spione also persuaded Langdon's reclusive oldest son Douglas to speak on camera for the first time about the painful family divisions that kept him absent from the theatrical version of movie. Yet there is hope and humor here, too, especially in a scene in which Langdon's upbeat daughter Janet moves into the family's 19th-century homestead, transforming it from a staid and somber residence into a cheerful and irreverent home where the children have done much of the decorating.

In the Special Features section of the disc, Mr. Spione also delves deep into the creative process of making the film and its effect on the family. A continuing theme throughout is the way the filmmaking experience shed light on hidden conflicts in the family, encouraging reflection and dialogue that may never have happened without the formal structure of making the film. The director himself appears on camera in several sequences, adding the more detailed background as well as the wider sociological perspective that will be familiar to audiences who have seen the filmmaker speak at theatrical screenings.

Rounding out the DVD are eight sequences that were deleted from the theatrically-released documentary for reasons of time. Here, we hear more from family members who play a supporting role in the original film, and see more of the daily work on the farm. Also included is a fascinating history, narrated by the Ames family, of the rise and fall of their little town of Richfield Springs as a tourist mecca in the early 20th century.

A native of the Hudson Valley, Mr. Spione was best known before *American Farm* for his award-winning short films, which have been shown on cable and public television, and have screened at film festivals worldwide. He studied directing at the State University of New York at Purchase in the 1980's, and has been a professional film and video editor for the past fifteen years.

At the center of *American Farm* is the predicament of the director's cousin, Langdon "Lanny" Ames, the fifth Ames son to own the farm. Born in 1938, Lanny had been actively running the operation since he was in his early twenties, when he assumed primary responsibility for the business. However, after a century-and-a half of family ownership, no one in the next generation was willing to take over the farm. Langdon's three sons all moved away to pursue other careers, and now have families of their own. To anyone living in rural America, it's a tale that's all too familiar.

"One of the great privileges of making this movie has been the response from rural communities," said Mr. Spione. "Audiences have been so receptive, with many people relating poignant tales about their own family farms, and voicing concerns about the economic and cultural pressures that seem to be threatening not just small farms, but a whole way of life."

Mr. Spione's film traces the success of his family's farm back to Langdon's father Murry, who is deeply revered by virtually everyone the filmmaker interviewed. "In many ways, my Uncle Murry *was* the farm," said Spione. "As a patriarch, he was the toughest act to follow--an even-handed pillar of strength who was quite literally the savior of the farm during the Great Depression." In comparing Murry's story to his son and grandsons, the movie reveals the nuances of personal character, as well as the broader generational shift in attitudes that affect the destiny of every family farm.

While Spione's close relationship to his subjects remained largely invisible in his original documentary, the DVD's additional sequences make clear the importance of *American Farm* to the director himself, highlighting how the making of the film reconnected the Manhattan-based filmmaker with his rural roots. Especially poignant are his observations about his conversation with his mother Shirley, the last surviving Ames of her generation, who relates a childhood memory in the movie of her own mother's untimely death in a freak accident on the farm. Throughout the film and its DVD additions, Spione's familiarity with his subjects results in similar moments of rare, sometimes heartbreaking candor. The director's presence on camera in the DVD only adds to the film's intimacy.

Yet, in the end, it is still his cousin Langdon's unwavering perseverance that remains the soul of this beautifully-produced DVD version of *American Farm*, standing as testament to the enduring pride and indomitable spirit of the American farmer.

The *American Farm* Collector's Edition DVD will be released by Passion River Films on February 19th. More information is available at www.passionriver.com or at the official film website, www.americanfarmmovie.com.