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DRYLAND

Directors' Statement

Both Sue and Richard draw inspiration from rural life—often seen in our work as a contrast between natural cycles and the cadences of human industry. Sue's forebears on both sides of her family engaged in agriculture through the early 1930s, leaving the land in Wisconsin and Appalachian Kentucky for town life during the Depression. But fortunately her grandfather's dairy in Janesville maintained the trade. Sue's affinity for agriculture emerged when her dad took her to farms along the bulk route, hauling milk back to the plant for processing. Richard's family lived outside Louisville, Kentucky in a ranging woodland where he spent long days exploring natural forms with his turtle-catching dog Red. His mother knew to whistle to Red at day's end, in order to finally retrieve Richard for supper.

Sue and Richard take joy in producing images and sharing stories pertaining to rural America. Daily and seasonal rhythms on the land and the exceptional work ethic of small-scale agrarians are deeply internalized in our perspectives and aesthetic. Our work portrays miners, ranchers, homesteaders, Native American artists, advocates for salmon restoration, among many other subjects—each film striving to capture the quality of human interaction with the natural world. Whether fashioning tools, harvesting, abrading a stone projectile point, or twining a traditional basket, the expression of knowledge, craft, and inherited memory of people tied to place greatly intrigues us as filmmakers.

In making *Dryland*, we became fascinated with the perseverance of farm families in an arid land, where increasing demands for technological advances and larger acreage confront economic and political uncertainties. But while the issues facing family farms are compelling, it's the physical gesture of work on a human scale that imbues this and our other stories with a sensibility different from issue-oriented films. In *Dryland*, the physical work, whether in the fields or during the derby, exemplifies a complex, evolving relationship between human and machine, as well as that with nature. Sequences of the combine derby, entwined with farming scenes, epitomize the essential partnership of work and play very natural to farmers.

Main character Josh Knodel's journey lies at the emotional heart of the film. Despite yearning all his life to stay on this fourth-generation farm, Josh must leave for a job with John Deere in Iowa, when his family is unable to purchase more land for him and his future family. At about the same time, Sue's folks in Oregon determined they were unable to maintain a 110-acre farm her dad had reforested over the course of 35 years. This loss sharpened Sue and Richard's empathy for all farmers facing difficult decisions relating to land and family legacy.

What's not endangered, however, is the drive and remarkable adaptiveness of farmers to work responsibly and efficiently to provide food, live well on the land, and build communities that will keep small-scale farming viable. We now see a rapidly growing international movement, where young urban dwellers are returning to agriculture—from backyard garden beds to multi-acre operations, with food-to-table events and farmers markets everywhere. We're heartened by this new adjunct to traditional agriculture, and we hope with *Dryland* to help nurture this urge, together ensuring that rural life, whether due to tending crops—or crashing combines—can indeed sustain the next generation on the land.