



Final Straw: Food, Earth, Happiness

2015 • Running time 70 minutes • Directed by Suhee Kang and
Patrick M. Lydon • Distributed by the filmmakers

Solutions for our most pressing global issues come from unexpected places. Inspired by the works of Masanobu Fukuoka, author of the seminal environmental book *The One-Straw Revolution*, the film *Final Straw* weaves landscapes and soundscapes together with insights from an inspiring cast of farmers, chefs, and teachers. Their stories give modern-day relevance to age-old ideas about food, environment, and happiness.

“A film with a very big heart...the world needs such films now more than ever.” —Brian Covert, journalist and lecturer at Doshisha University, Kyoto

TEACHER'S GUIDE



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Face to Face Media 2019



Final Straw: Food, Earth, Happiness



Curator

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Filmmakers

*Suhee Kang and
Patrick M. Lydon*



WHY I SELECTED THIS FILM

I use this film in my environmental history and food systems course. As a scholar trained in early American, environmental, and borderlands history, I am interested in seeing how long-term environmental change intersects with modern food systems and with community-based movements that are fighting for access to healthy environments in rural and urban areas. This film connects all these themes as it shows the growing connection between organic farmers and community-based social movements.

I found this film complements the “application” portion of the course when my students participate in the sustainable urban farm lab on campus. By pointing out what others have successfully achieved, the film further motivates students to engage in small-scale permaculture food production.

SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS

Activism	Environmental History
Agriculture	Environmental Justice
Biodiversity	Farming
Capitalism	Habitat Loss
Ecosystems	Permaculture
Environmental Education	Sustainability

SYNOPSIS

Final Straw: Food, Earth, Happiness offers a compelling direction for those seeking to unplug from the materially driven, resource-intensive global food system. For nearly a century, industrial farming has unleashed ecologically destructive ways of growing food across the planet, affecting economies, cultures, health, and biodiversity. This film highlights aspirational but achievable methods to create “natural farms” in this thought-provoking journey through Japan, Korea, and the United States. It manages to turn our perceptions of food and life upside down in a remarkably simple and poetic way.

Current-day leaders in the natural farming movement are featured in the film, including Yoshikazu Kawaguchi (Japan), Seonghyun Choi (Korea), and Larry Korn (United States), as well as a dozen others ranging from farmers and chefs to urbanites. Together, their stories illuminate a brilliant yet maddeningly simple path to sustainability and well-being for people and the environment, one that is centered around the philosophies of the late Masanobu Fukuoka and his seminal environmental book *The One-Straw Revolution*.

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*“Thought-provoking
and inspiring...a
powerful call to
action.”*

—Clean Eating magazine

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOCUS OF THE FILM

This film centers on the intersection of justice, sustainability, and simplicity. Utilizing a comparative lens across two continents, the film counters other compelling but dire environmental justice narratives by focusing on the agency, beauty, and holistic nature of sustainable permaculture practices.

Equally important, the film is larger than the sum of its parts, as it has created a foundation for collaborating with environmental justice efforts, linking the directors with non-profit groups, community-based organizations, urban farms, school gardens, and art collectives, all centered around social and ecological well-being.



KEY LOCATIONS AND PEOPLE

Japan, South Korea, and North America

Masanobu Fukuoka – author of *The One-Straw Revolution*

Yoshikazu Kawaguchi – natural farmer

Larry Korn – student of Fukuoka and translator of *The One-Straw Revolution*

Yoshiki Yamamoto – green tea farmer

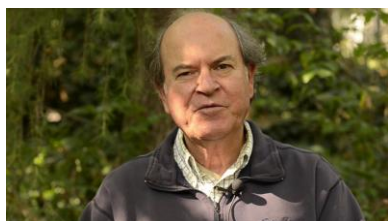
Additional interviews: Kristyn Leach, Etsuko Kagamiyama, Ryosok Hong, Maki Sobajima, Kenji Murakami, Osamu Kita, Kazuaki Okitsu, and Dennis Lee



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“The film filled me up with great joy and inspiration...I’m going to watch the film today...for the eighth time.”

—Viewer Rafayah Uzzyah, Philadelphia, Pa.



FILM CHAPTERS

00:00	Part 1: Modern Life
02:35	Capitalism/Material-Based Life
08:10	Earth Is Paradise
13:17	Farmer Beginnings

The film begins with a meditation on natural farming in Japan, explaining the core philosophy around understanding nature, beauty, and humanity’s place within nature. The interviews in this section focus on natural farmers in Japan and South Korea. Advocates of natural farming explore the disconnect that has developed over time between the production of food for humans and the capacity and needs of ecosystems. Current practices are unsustainable and will continue to degrade farmland with disastrous consequences. This situation developed, they argue, when human food production was forced into a capitalist framework with a focus on profits and a lack of attention to the ecosystems that support food production and human life. The solution to this dilemma is for people to live on Earth as though it were heaven and to treat nature with the utmost respect. Natural farming, they believe, can help repair damaged ecosystems and soils and reconnect humans with nature.

20:17	Part 2: Natural Farming
24:30	Basic Natural Farming Ideas
28:45	Intellect vs. Intuition/Progress
36:28	Perception of Natural Farming
41:00	Cycle of Life/Hidden Circle
46:47	Biodiversity

This section explores and elaborates on the concept of natural farming. The farmers, including Yoshiki Yamamoto, a natural green tea farmer, talk extensively about the importance of preserving soil biology through no-till farming and the importance of working with (rather than against) weeds to improve and repair soil structure. “Weeds and insects are your friends!” is a common refrain. “Plant food that is suited to your natural environment” is another. These are the same core concepts of natural farming that are evident in any sustainable farming system. The interviewees elegantly mix discussion of their farming practices with more philosophical comments about the need for simplicity, observation, relationships, intuition, and “feeling with your hands.”

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51:15 **Part 3: In Practice and Life**

54:27 Doing Natural Farming

1:00:43 As a Job/Self-sufficiency

1:04:00 Relationships

This final section connects natural farming with larger social, philosophical, and ecological issues around relationships, self-sufficiency, and minimal living. In particular, it discusses how consumers and city dwellers inhabit or practice the precepts of natural farming.



The interviews in this segment argue that urban dwellers can indeed engage in these practices and that these simple-living techniques require methods similar to those of natural farming: slowing down, observing the landscape, locating the “joy of the earth.” The natural farmers interviewed all notice that the youth in cities tend to reach out toward natural farming precisely because it offers meaning and relationships not realized in the city. Natural farming reconnects humans with other forms of life. Natural farming “is enough.”



1:10:50 **Animation by Heeyoung Park**

A beautifully animated short just over three minutes in length can be found at the tail of the film, following the credits. The filmmakers frequently show the animation as an introduction to the documentary.

SELECTED EXCERPT

If you are unable to watch the entire 70-minute film in class or assign it for viewing outside class, a 16-minute clip can be viewed instead. The excerpt begins at 24:40, with a pan of Seonghyun Choi walking across his field with a bundle of straw on his back, and ends at 40:20 with a meditative shot of rice drying at sunset. This section covers all the core ideas of natural farming and should generate good discussion around the topic.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ideally, the students will have watched the film online outside class. But even if this is the case, showing the 16-minute excerpt will generate a much deeper discussion.

Ask students to reflect individually on two of the five questions below, writing their observations during the classroom screening of the 16-minute excerpt and for about 10 minutes afterward.



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1. What is natural farming?
2. Is natural farming scalable?
3. Is it possible to feed the world without industrial agriculture?
4. How do urban dwellers and/or consumers fit into the “natural farming” concept?
5. How does natural farming address social and/or ecological challenges?

Next, ask the students to pair up and discuss what they wrote. Finally, have each pair discuss their findings with the class as a whole.

ACTIVITIES

In addition to the discussion activity, I highly recommend that students engage in some type of natural farming activity. This could be done most easily in a campus garden but can also take place in the classroom. In the garden, I have my students plant heirloom varieties of seeds that are matched to the season and region that are conducive to their growth. This is a core principle of natural farming. Students may also research and plant “messy” gardens that are biodynamic rather than rigid and orderly.

If there is no access to a garden space, there are easy in-class activities that can involve “show and tell,” including asking students to bring in bioregional seeds, plants, soil, etc. The “tell” aspect of the exercise can include explaining how the material might be considered suitable for a natural farm. Finally, students can locate and visit local urban farms, non-profit food justice groups, and/or a school garden to see community-supported agriculture in action.



Beyond the film: a word from the directors

“We are working internationally through film, art, nature experiences, urban gardening, educational programming, and community-oriented projects to catalyze ways of thinking and being that sustain and nurture all human relationships, both social and ecological. We founded the [SocieCity](#) collective and [The Branch, Osaka](#), to support these extended works.”

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

I have used the works below to combine theory, history, and praxis as they relate to sustainable growing and living.

Websites

Food Tank: The Think Tank for Food <http://www.foodtank.com/>

Baltimore Urban Gardening with Students After-School Program
<https://livingclassrooms.org/programs/baltimore-urban-gardening-students-school-program-bugs/>

Detroit Dirt <https://www.detroitdirt.org/>

Urban Farms in Paris <https://www.paris.fr/agricultureurbaine>

Grow City <http://www.grow-city.org/>

Texts

Brian Donahue and Edwin C. Hagenstein, *American Georgics: Writings on Farming, Culture, and the Land*

Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*



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Bill Mollison, *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*

David W. Orr, Michael K. Stone, and Zenobia Barlow, *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*

Ivette Perfecto and John Vandermeer, *Nature's Matrix: Linking Agriculture, Conservation, and Food Sovereignty*

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*