



LOOK & SEE: WENDELL BERRY'S KENTUCKY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES GUIDE

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A LETTER FROM MARY BERRY*

Dear Friends,

My mother, Tanya Berry, says of my father Wendell Berry's work that his principal talent is the art of repeating himself. My father's subject for almost sixty years has been the land and the people who belong to the land of Henry County, Kentucky. His essays, poetry, and fiction concern the sayings and doings of the people and the welfare of the land, the water and all of the creatures that make up a particular place. He has been, and is, fascinated by the farm where he and my mother raised my brother and me and where they make their home and their life today.

Laura Dunn and Jef Sewell's film, *Look & See*, is helping my father repeat himself another way. Laura has said that she wanted to give people a glimpse into "Wendell's world" and what he sees everyday. She has accomplished that as well as anyone could. I have heard her say also that she hopes that the film will encourage the audience to read my father's work. A film that drives people to books is, as my father says in *Look & See*, "a proper challenge."

Why has my father needed, and wanted, to repeat himself so many times in so many ways? Why have these filmmakers felt the need to bring his world to filmgoers? Because he is talking about the destruction of what we must have to survive and not enough people have listened. They listened. Because he is talking about what it will take to build a culture that will value and take care of what we must have to survive and they listened. He is talking about working landscapes and rural people and they listened. And maybe most difficult for human beings, he says that we must accept and live within the limits of nature and of our own ignorance. That just because we are capable of doing something doesn't mean that we should do it.

After farming for a living all of my adult life and being raised on a working farm, I started The Berry Center in 2011 to continue the work of my family in agriculture. Maybe the most important thing I learned from the seven generations of my family that lived here before me was that the destruction of rural places and the displacement of farm people has not been inevitable. It has been the result of decisions far away from the places that have to live everyday with the results of those decisions. It is hopeful to believe that the troubles we are dealing with today are not the inevitable result of progress. Better decisions can be made and all of us can make them. We must become a nation of agrarians and "homecomers," citizens who make their lives in one place whether or not it is where they started out. As Gary Snyder says, "just stop somewhere."

I believe that I have now seen *Look & See* more than anyone other than the makers of the film. I have answered questions after a showing of the film from one coast to the other. Several times it has occurred to me to leave after the movie starts and come back at the end, but the minute it starts and I hear my father's voice, I stay. It offers what I have found to be true about great paintings or pieces of music or books one loves, something to think about with every viewing. The film gives the viewer, if the viewer allows it, many opportunities to think more deeply about culture and agriculture. The farmers in the film make some profound statements worthy of thought and study. When Mark Roberts says, "I can't go out on my farm and do enough work with my two hands to pay for my farm," we should take notice and wonder what kind of an economy has made that impossible. The black and white photographs of my family and our neighbors working together to harvest Owen Flood's tobacco crop in 1973 show a time when it was possible, by trading work, to make a living and pay for a farm doing one's own work. The Burley Tobacco Program made it possible. This program protected a crop that turned out to be indefensible, but the program itself was absolutely defensible.



How did it work? Could it work again this time by protecting farmers from overproduction and by stabilizing prices? Are we or are we not going to value our land and the people who know how to use it well? *Look & See* suggests some things that should spark our curiosity to look and see for ourselves.

To change the way things are we must tell the truth. The local food movement has been going on for forty years and has made almost no change in land use in this country nor has it changed the culture of agriculture. The demand for delicious, well-raised, organic food going up in urban places has met the rural culture coming down. If we accept that food is a cultural product then this disconnect must be thought about and worked on. To do good work in a place requires knowledge of the place. What was here? What has happened here? What is already here that we can build on?

Look & See is a beautiful film made by artists who have taken the problems of rural people and places seriously and treated us with respect. My husband Steve Smith says, when talking about his first encounter with my father's book, *The Unsettling of America*, "It told the story of my people. It captured the emotion of it. It treated us with respect. We weren't used to being respected."

I can say the same about *Look & See*, and I am grateful.

Sincerely,
Mary Berry

* Originally appeared in *Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry* Discussion Guide, developed and written by Film Sprout for Two Bird Films, 2017.



FILM SYNOPSIS

Look & See: Wendell Berry's Kentucky is a portrait of the changing landscapes and shifting values of rural America in the era of industrial agriculture, as seen through the mind's eye of award-winning writer and farmer Wendell Berry, back home in his native Henry County, Kentucky.

Approximate Running Time: 54 minutes

SCREENING CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

Over the past fifty years, farmer, writer, and social critic Wendell Berry has amassed a loyal following in rural and urban communities alike. His prolific writing captures on paper the natural beauty of rural America, its caretakers, and its cultural values, while his social commentary—written at the dawn of a new era in agricultural policy—warns of the consequences of industrial agriculture. Your screenings of *Look & See: Wendell Berry's Kentucky* offer an opportunity to reflect on his words and the experiences of modern-day farmers whose lives have been shaped by the realities of industrial agriculture. In addition, the strategies in this guide are designed to meet these engagement goals:

- Facilitate connections among rural, urban, and suburban communities and between agricultural growers and consumers.
- Empower rural communities to share their own stories and challenge stereotypes about rural areas.
- Create dialogue about the future of food production and explore alternative approaches to agricultural practices.
- Celebrate the writing of Wendell Berry by encouraging audiences to reconnect with the land and natural environment around them.

RELEVANT TOPICS AND ISSUES

- Wendell Berry
- Writing & Poetry
- Agriculture
- Food
- Industrial Agriculture
- Commercialization
- Organic Farming
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)

POTENTIAL AUDIENCES

- Wendell Berry fans
- Organic and CSA farmers
- Consumers of organic foods
- Members of CSAs
- Farmer Markets regulars
- Agricultural associations
- Environmental advocates
- Writing and poetry groups
- Students



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wendell Berry was born in 1934 during the Great Depression. He was the oldest of four children raised on his family farm in New Castle, Kentucky. His parents, Virginia and John Berry, were descendants of farmers themselves and highly educated. His mother had attended college, which was rare for the time, and was an avid reader. His father studied law and worked as a congressional staffer during the New Deal era.

Wendell Berry received his bachelor's and master's degree in English at the University of Kentucky, where he met his wife Tanya. He then accepted a fellowship in the Wallace Stegner writing program at Stanford University and traveled to Italy on a Guggenheim fellowship. He spent two years teaching at New York University before being invited to teach at University of Kentucky. Berry returned home to Henry County, Kentucky, and he and Tanya bought a farm near his family land where he farmed and wrote extensively—publishing more than 50 books of essays, poetry, and fiction. (Skinner, 2012)

Select works by Wendell Berry include:

Essays

2010: Imagination in Place
2009: Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food
1992: Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community
1990: What Are People For?
1977: The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture
1969: The Long-Legged House

Poetry

2013: This Day: New and Collected Sabbath Poems 1979 - 2012
2012: New Collected Poems
2008: The Mad Farmer Poems
1999: The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry
1985: Window Poems

Fiction

2004: That Distant Land: The Collected Stories
2004: Hannah Coulter
2000: Jayber Crow
1967: A Place on Earth
1960: Nathan Coulter

Berry's writing is a direct extension of his passion for farming and the land. His work ranges from handbooks on farming techniques to poetry about wildlife to stories about a fictitious rural community in Kentucky named Port William. It was his early essays that launched him into the national discourse on agricultural policy in the 1970s and landed him across the round table from Earl Butz, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture under President Nixon and Ford, in the debate on agricultural land use that is seen in the film.

Butz himself was raised on a farm in Indiana, studied at Purdue University, and worked in agribusiness shortly before being appointed to lead the USDA. While in office, he overhauled U.S. agricultural policy that dated back the New Deal. During the Great Depression and on the heels of the Dust Bowl, New Deal policy makers aimed to stabilize food prices by managing the supply of agricultural products. Farmers were paid not to plant some of their land to prevent overproduction and reserves were stockpiled to use in times of bad harvest. Butz, on the other hand, thought farmers should be encouraged to plant every acre as a way to increase profits. “Get big or get out” was his popular refrain. Under his guidance, policy makers cut the subsidies for non-planting and sold excess food stores overseas for large profits. (Goldstein, 2008)

Shortly after the stores were depleted, a drought hit the Midwest and prices for farm products jumped dramatically. Farmers scrambled to plant as much as they could, taking on large amounts of debt to finance their expansions. The bubble burst in the 1980s, however, and prices plummeted. Many small family farms collapsed under the debt. Larger commercial agribusiness bought up small farms in droves, consolidated them, and maximized corn and soybean production—giving rise to concentrated-animal feedlot operations (CAFOs), which house thousands of animals on a single farm. (Philpott, 2008)

In the course of a century, the total number of farmers in the U.S. decreased to one-third of what it was in 1910. (Shute, 2011) Were he alive today, Butz would have likely maintained that farm consolidation and expansion were positive results of free market economics that made food cheaper and farming more profitable. Berry, on the other hand, views the changes in agriculture as direct threats to the health and wellness of rural communities—destroying our nurturing relationship to the land and eroding traditional Christian values of neighborliness.

Berry himself lives by these values, still farming a small homestead near Port Royal, Kentucky, well into his 80s. He is a technology skeptic and decidedly anti-screen, which posed a unique challenge for filmmaker Laura Dunn in making *Look & See*. Berry agreed to participate in the film only if he did not have to appear on camera, permitting his community of family, friends, and followers to speak for him.

Berry is the recipient of many distinguished awards, including the 2010 National Medal of Arts and Humanities. (Skinner, 2012)

Learn more about the writing of Wendell Berry and the changes in agriculture in the *Look & See* discussion guide, developed and written by Film Sprout for Two Bird Films, available upon request by emailing indielenspopup@itvs.org.

Sources:

- *Look & See* discussion guide. Developed and written by Film Sprout for Two Bird Films, 2017.
- Shute, Lindsey Lusher. “BUILDING A FUTURE WITH FARMERS: Challenges Faced by Young, American Farmers and a National Strategy to Help Them Succeed.” National Young Farmers Coalition, 2011. http://www.youngfarmers.org/reports/Building_A_Future_With_Farmers.pdf
- Skinner, David. “Wendell E. Berry Biography.” National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 2012. <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-biography>
- Goldstein, Richard. “Earl L. Butz, Secretary Felled by Racial Remark, Is Dead at 98.” *The New York Times*, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/04/washington/04butz.html>
- Philpott, Tom. “A reflection on the lasting legacy of 1970s USDA Secretary Earl Butz.” *Grist*, 2008. <https://grist.org/article/the-butz-stops-here/>



FRAMING THE CONVERSATION AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While *Look & See* is set in the tobacco fields of Kentucky, the issues raised in the film are familiar to farmers in a variety of agriculture across the U.S. Your landscape, seasons, and products may look different in your state, but your local farmers will likely be faced with similar questions about sustainability and profitability.

Urban and suburban communities are just as affected by the conversation—how we source our food is a universal question. Urban farming, community gardening, farmer’s markets, slow food, organics, and CSAs are all responses to the industrialization of rural agriculture and many can be found in urban and suburban areas. The power of your screenings lies in the potential to facilitate connections among rural, urban, and suburban communities that go beyond the consumer-producer commercial relationship.

2018 is an election year. During recent election years, it has been common to see news stories about the political and cultural divide between rural areas and urban and suburban ones. Your screenings are an opportunity to disrupt those stereotypes and engage a dialogue that highlights our commonalities and celebrates our differences.

There will also be a federal farm bill up for discussion in 2018. Remember that Indie Lens Pop-Up screenings should not include any direct advocacy, for example, contacting legislators about a specific policy. It’s important to be transparent about this with your partner organizations. However, you can use your screenings to educate your audience about the farm bill and to listen to community input about the various proposals it might include. For more information around advocacy guidelines and restrictions for your screenings is included in the Indie Lens Pop-Up Program Toolkit on page 10 (<http://bit.ly/ILPopProgramToolkit>).

When planning your screenings, keep in mind that Sunday April 22, 2018 is Earth Day—an annual time when many environmental organizations plan events to raise awareness about sustainability and conservation. You can consider incorporating your event into the Earth Day activities or plan around it to avoid competing events.

April and May are also the start of planting season in many climates. Contact your farmers early to plan around their planting schedules.

CONVERSATION STARTER

Your *Look & See* DVD and Blu-ray features the following conversation starter on the menu screen before the film starts:

How has agriculture shaped the American way of life, then and now?

Project the conversation starter before the film begins as guests are taking their seat at your venue. Prior to the film or your panel discussion, encourage participants to turn to a person sitting near them to share their answers for two to three minutes including any recent examples that come to mind. If time permits, invite a few people to share with the entire group.



POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND/OR SPEAKERS

Invite speakers from one or several of these suggested categories below to discuss the themes in the film with your audience. If your speaker is affiliated with an organization or has a following in your community, ask them to invite their supporters to your event to participate in the discussion and make sure to provide all the necessary materials to help them promote.

- Amplify the voices of your **local farmers** to see if their experiences resemble those expressed in the film. Organic, CSA, and sustainable farmers will all likely have perspectives to share on why they have chosen not to use industrial farming methods.
 - Search the Farm Aid Resource Network directory to find farming organizations by state (tip: select the “Industrial Ag & Factory Farm Issues” option in your search): <http://frn.farmaid.org/>
 - Find a local member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC): <http://sustainableagriculture.net/about-us/members/>
 - Locate a chapter of Slow Food USA in your state: <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/find-local-chapters>
 - Look through the member organizations of the Organic Farmers Association: <http://organicfarmersassociation.org/organization-members/>
 - Find a CSA farm near you through the Local Harvest database (tip: enter your city in the search bar at the top of the page or zoom in on the map): <https://www.localharvest.org/>
 - Reach out to your university’s cooperative extension agency to get connected to farmers and rural communities across the state. Check out this USDA directory: <http://bit.ly/2GbUa9z>
- Reach out to the **English literature department** at your local university to find professors or writers influenced by Wendell Berry. You could ask them to guide the audience through a recommended reading list of Berry’s work, invite them to read excerpts from their favorite of Berry’s work, or have them lead a workshop on how to write a poem inspired by nature. Look through the list of organizations affiliated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) to find an educational network that has contacts in your area: <https://www.asle.org/explore-our-field/affiliated-organizations/>.
- Ask local **historians and researchers** to provide an understanding of how agriculture and rural culture has changed in your state over the last several decades. Reach out to your local university’s History department or Agriculture and Life Sciences College for recommendations. Or you can contact the Agricultural History Society to see if they can provide a local reference: <http://www.aghistorysociety.org/contact/>.
- **Environmental advocates** in your area will likely be working on issues related to large-scale farming, such as water quality or soil erosion. Invite them to educate your audience about the local environmental concerns that result from industrial agriculture. Make sure to connect with them early to coordinate with their Earth Day event schedules.
 - Find a chapter of the Sierra Club: <https://www.sierraclub.org/near-you>
 - Connect with a regional section of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC): <https://www.nrdc.org/united-states>
 - Search the list of ecosystems experts affiliated with the Environmental Defense Fund: <https://www.edf.org/people/staff-of-experts/all/ecosystems>



- Invite **faith leaders** from rural communities to discuss their perspectives on the way values have changed as a result of changing agricultural landscapes and economics. Look through the member organizations affiliated with the National Farmworker Ministry for local contacts: <http://nfwm.org/about/member-organizations/>.
- Involve advocates or educators in the **farm to school movement**, which work with schools to serve locally sourced food in its cafeteria and teach students about how to grow and prepare food. Search for a local organization in the National Farm to School network: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Arrange a moderator to facilitate a discussion with your panel of speakers or with your audience members. These questions could be adapted for either type of discussion. It's a good idea to review questions with your moderator and speakers before the event and select discussion topics accordingly.

- When did you discover Wendell Berry? How has his writing influenced you?
- How does Wendell Berry's life work relate to your life work? Share with us your relationship to rural America, farming, and/or food production.
- The 40-paned window in Wendell Berry's home greatly influenced his perspective on farming and therefore his writing. What "frames" your perspective on the world? What experiences or values shape your worldview?
- Did the experiences expressed by the farmers interviewed in the film resonate with you? Why or why not?
- *Look & See* is based in Kentucky where Wendell Berry was born and now lives and writes. Can you provide an overview of what agriculture looks like in our state? For example, what do we grow here or approximately how many people are directly involved in agriculture production?
- Have you witnessed changes in our state's agricultural industry over the past fifty years? If so, how are they similar and/or different to the changes described in the film?
- From your perspective, how have the changes in agriculture affected rural communities in our state? What about our local urban or suburban communities—how have they been affected by the changes in food production?
- Wendell Berry's writing and the farmers interviewed in the film both express lament for the ways industrialized agriculture has changed not only farming, but also the cultural values of rural communities. Do you agree with this critique? Why or why not?
- In the spirit of Wendell Berry, how might we promote the value of neighborliness within our own community and among rural, urban, and suburban communities in our area?
- As food consumers, do you think it important that we have a relationship with the people and places that grow our food? Why or why not?



- In the film, we see a few of the Kentucky farmers become reinvigorated by the organic farming and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movements. What developments in agriculture, sustainability, and/or food production make you feel hopeful and excited?

We also recommend these questions excerpted from the *Look & See* discussion guide, developed and written by Film Sprout for Two Bird Films:

- Wendell and Tanya Berry taught their children to “look and see,” as Mary Berry observes. Reflect on your early memories; how were you taught to observe and interact with the natural world?
- Reflect on how rural communities are depicted in popular culture, including the press, literature, movies, and television. What are trends or themes you notice? What is missing from these representations?
- Steve Smith describes farming as a “handmade art.” What are the handmade or entrepreneurial industries in your town or city? What are some of the pressures facing these independent producers and creators?
- As farm sizes have grown, the number of farmers has declined. Before industrialization, 45% of Americans farmed the land. In 1974, only 4% did. Today, it’s 1%. What are some long-term consequences of concentrating farming among a small percentage of the population?
- Mary Berry notes that we do not really count the full cost of industrialized agriculture. What are some of the hidden costs of large-scale farming? Consider effects on ecology, human health, and community cohesion.
- Black and white photographs by James Baker Hall show the change from hand labor to mechanization in Henry County. Before mechanization, families in a community would come together to help each other harvest and process their crops. Today, migrant workers are essential to many producers. Reflect on the differing impacts on communities between these periods, both in Henry County and in Mexico, where the majority of migrant workers in Henry County are from.
- How can communities reconcile industrial development with maintaining a sense of place or connection to land and food systems? How can urban and suburban dwellers who are not a part of farming communities be connected to and a part of sustainable farming systems?
- Mary Berry highlights the need for the local food movement to be the beginning, not the end, of cultural and economic change. What are the cultural or economic changes you would like to see to our agricultural and/or food systems?



ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES BEYOND A PANEL

These activities can help to further create an engaging and memorable experience for your audience. They can be organized in addition to or instead of a traditional post-screening panel discussion.

- Invite **writers and poets** to perform their works about rural appreciation for your audience. Put out a call for submissions at least a month before your event and ask for locals to send in their work to be selected for the performance. You could also have local writers and poets—or perhaps students—perform a reading of Wendell Berry’s work.
- Host a **CSA fair** or your own farmer’s market. Find the CSA farmers in your area and invite them to come market their CSA to your audience members. Make it easy for audience members to sign up for a CSA membership so they can receive regular boxes with locally sourced food. See the Potential Partners and/or Speakers section above to find links to farmer directories.
- If your venue allows, arrange a **farm to table dinner** featuring all locally sourced food. Invite a caterer to cook for your guests; if budget does not allow you to hire a caterer, consider asking them to be an in-kind sponsor of the event in exchange for advertising them heavily in your event promotions. You could also take your screening to a local farm to table restaurant for a special dinner and a movie presentation.
- If your climate permits, organize an **outdoor screening** at a local farm or in a community garden. Consider having any panel discussions or other engagement activities before the screening while it is still light, and then start the film at dusk.
- Coordinate a **seed exchange** by asking your audience to bring garden seeds to swap with other audience members at your event. This is a fun and easy way for gardeners to connect with one another or to encourage someone who has never gardened before to give it a try. You could also partner with a local gardening club or heirloom seed supplier in your area to see if they would give away seeds at your event.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the resources listed throughout this guide, these websites provide additional information that may be helpful in preparing for your screenings of *Look & See: Wendell Berry’s Kentucky*.

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/look-see-wendell-berrys-kentucky/> - The companion site created by *Independent Lens* for *Look & See: Wendell Berry’s Kentucky*

<https://lookandseefilm.com/> - The filmmaker website for *Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry*

<http://berrycenter.org/> - The Berry Center, created by the family of Wendell Berry to advocate for farmers, land-conserving communities, and healthy regional economies.

<http://www.counterpointpress.com/authors/wendell-berry/> - Counterpoint Press, publisher of Wendell Berry works.

<http://www.dailyonder.com/> - The Daily Yonder, a source for rural news, created by the Center for Rural Strategies: <https://www.ruralstrategies.org/>



<http://agofthemiddle.org/> - Agriculture of the Middle seeks to renew small and mid-sized farming and ranching through innovative market relationships.

<http://www.ofrf.org/> - Organic Farming Research Foundation works to foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems.

<https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/> - Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Iowa aims to identify and develop new ways to farm profitably while conserving natural resources as well as reducing negative environmental and social impacts.

<http://www.youngfarmers.org/> - National Young Farmers Coalition represents, mobilizes, and engages young farmers to ensure their success.

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ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, *Independent Lens*, as well as other PBS series and through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit itvs.org.

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter @IndependentLens.