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## MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS AMONG MIDWESTERN FARMERS EXPLORED IN “GREENER PASTURES,” PREMIERING ON INDEPENDENT LENS ON MARCH 25, 2024

FEBRUARY 5, 2024

*Documentary Follows Intimate Lives of Four Midwestern Farm Families Persevering through Climate Change, Industrialization, and Mental Health Crises*

(San Francisco, CA) February 5, 2024—Closing the Winter season of INDEPENDENT LENS documentaries, “Greener Pastures” will premiere on March 25, 2024. From first-time feature director/producer Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian and producer Ian Robertson Kibbe, the documentary follows the daily lives of four Midwestern farm families in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin over five years, as a combination of climate change, the pandemic, and the domination of megafarms have contributed to increasing economic uncertainty and isolation.

“Greener Pastures” will debut on PBS’s INDEPENDENT LENS on Monday, March 25, 2024, at 10 p.m. (check local listings). The film will be available to stream on the [PBS App](#).

Mirpoorian began the journey in 2018 after hearing a report on NPR’s “All Things Considered” that farmers had the highest rate of suicide by any profession, by more than 30 percent. What followed was a five-year, 60,000-mile journey to find farmers willing to share intimate details of their daily lives and to follow their stories.

“Even living in Indiana, I can attest that few outside of these rural communities truly understand the significance that the farming industry has in the U.S.,” said director/producer Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian. “I’m continually inspired by the subjects of our film and their resilience and perseverance, and hope that anyone who watches finds a new understanding of the ripple effects this crisis can have.”

Mirpoorian introduces us to Jeff, a corn and soybean farmer in Monroe, Wisconsin, who tried to end his own life nearly 27 years ago by setting a building on fire while he was still inside. Today, he runs a farmer mental health nonprofit called T.U.G.S. (Talking, Understanding, Growing, Supporting), traveling across the Midwest and talking to farmers about mental health, suicide prevention, and the stigma associated with depression.

Julie, a dairy farmer in Minnesota, was once a frequent dairy show competitor, but now struggles with alcoholism and is shown working to regain control over her life, going through rehab and meeting with her sponsor. When the rent on her land increases and COVID-19 fractures the food chain, her progress is threatened, and she is forced to move to another farm.

Jay is a sixth-generation farmer and owns the same land in Ohio that was granted to his family in the late 1700s—he still has the original deed with Thomas Jefferson’s signature. But the future of his farm is uncertain as falling milk prices, competition from larger farms, and stormy weather may force him to sell his cows and close his farming operations. Fortunately, his wife, Melissa, is a skilled baker and helps support the family with a small cake shop she runs, though it is not without its own struggles.

In Clear Lake, Iowa, we meet Chris, a livestock farmer, who at age 5 found his mother’s body after she died by suicide when their family farm was foreclosed. As a result, Chris works tirelessly lobbying for farmers’ rights, regularly traveling across the state as an advocate for farmers. A Democrat and progressive liberal, Chris has been connected to nearly every Democratic presidential candidate that has come through Iowa seeking the nomination in the past two decades.

Chris’ daughter Becky is forging her own path for her family. She and her husband, Curtis, run a small sustainable farm, practicing regenerative agriculture and selling their produce at the local farmer’s market. Though she does not see a future in production agriculture like her father, she is determined to carry on her father’s legacy of political activism by running for District Soil and Water Commissioner. In the fall of 2020, Becky won her election as the sole woman, beating all incumbents by a large margin.

“Greener Pastures’ gives a face to the mental health crisis affecting farming communities across the country,” said Lois Vossen, executive producer of INDEPENDENT LENS. “We hope this film will give audiences a better

understanding of the value of farmers and why the struggles they face create a community problem that must be addressed.”

Visit the [“Greener Pastures”](#) page on INDEPENDENT LENS to learn more about the film.

#### **About the Filmmakers**

##### **Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian, Director/Producer**

Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian is an award-winning Iranian-American filmmaker exploring themes at the intersection of time, health, and science. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, Vimeo Staff Picks, *The Atlantic*, and NBC. In 2023, he was named a PBS Wyncote Fellow and is a recipient of the Kodak Motion Picture Film Bronze Award for Excellence in Filmmaking.

##### **Ian Robertson Kibbe, Producer**

Ian Robertson Kibbe is a Southern-raised, Midwest-based, mixed-race, white-presenting, Chicago filmmaker with a love of rural stories. He produced the award-winning Kartemquin Film's “Raising Bertie” (POV 2017). Presently, he's co-chair of the DPA's Equity & Inclusion Committee and an alum of IFP Labs, Good Pitch, and Doc Society Climate Story Fund.

<b>Director</b>	Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian
<b>Producer</b>	Ian Robertson Kibbe Samuel-Ali Mirpoorian
<b>Executive Producer</b>	David J. Cornfield Linda A. Cornfield Lois Vossen
<b>Co-Executive Producer</b>	Jason Stephens

**ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS**

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning PBS documentary series. With founding executive producer Lois Vossen, the series has been honored with 10 Academy Award nominations and features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, INDEPENDENT LENS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. Stream anytime on the PBS App. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](https://pbs.org/independentlens).

**ABOUT ITVS**

Independent Television Services (ITVS) is the largest co-producer of independent documentaries in the United States. For more than 30 years, the San Francisco nonprofit has funded and partnered with documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning titles and premieres them on our Emmy Award-winning PBS series, INDEPENDENT LENS. ITVS titles appear on PBS, WORLD, NETA, and can be streamed on various digital platforms including the PBS App. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit [itvs.org](https://itvs.org).

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