



September 2006

Straight Talk from a Former Cattleman
The *Satya* Interview with Howard Lyman

Shaking Things Up: Film Review

Mad Cowboy: The Documentary directed by Michael Tobias (79 minutes)

That mad cowboy is at it again. Only this time, he's not engaging colleges or vegetarian conferences—Howard Lyman is in the movies! After 45 years of operating a feedlot, Lyman sold his ranch and started lobbying for family farmers. Lyman soon realized grassroots was where he needed to be. Traveling 300 days out of the year on speaking tours, Lyman asks people all over the world to examine why we are destroying the earth and ourselves. Of his work and the film, he says, "it is, without a doubt, the most important thing I have been involved with in my entire life."

Mad Cowboy is perhaps one of the most effective of all animal rights documentaries. Lyman's perspective is genuine and his mission is embraced by viewers the minute the film begins. Presenting new voices and issues that go beyond the norm, Lyman tackles the entire spectrum of animal consumption in a manner that is easy and enjoyable to watch.

Lyman's personal story—from his cattle ranching days to his battle with a life-threatening illness that opened his eyes to his diet and occupation—is intricately woven throughout the film. Memorable quotes from his wife Willow Jean punctuate the film as she describes watching her husband grow into his compassion and revive himself with truth. Lyman's awakening led him to turn his life around, looking into organic agriculture, veganism, politics and his research into Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, aka mad cow disease.

Lyman visits cattle ranchers who are concerned about the corporatization of our food. Richard Gannon, a rancher in Constableville, NY, conveys the sad truth that there is absolutely no way to make a living from being a small farmer. Harry Mitchel, another small farmer, expresses concerns about people not knowing the truth about their food, being subjected to questionable practices, and putting their futures in danger.

Lyman cleverly presents mad cow disease by pulling on heartstrings. He interviews family members of victims, while opening eyes to the reality presented by scientists,

researchers and doctors. Traveling to Switzerland, he visits the president of Prionics (the world's only prion institute), Bruno Oesch.

Mad Cowboy is moving and effective. The scene of pigs in pens awaiting slaughter, though not bloody or particularly horrifying, made my tears roll. Walking between rows of pigs in pens, Lyman is followed by cameras; all you can see is hundreds of desperate and terrified faces looking back. Hundreds of bodies hoofing over one another, squealing and attempting to climb the sides of the pen, knowing they're about to become dinner.

Lyman ends with a question: "How long is it gonna take?"

See the film, become involved and be part of the answer. —**M.W.**

To learn more or order copies of the DVD, visit www.madcowboy.com.