

'Bullish' local farmer sprouts new film

By MICHAEL MILLIUS

"We have the choice to use the gift of our life to make the world a better place — or not to bother." So said noted anthropologist Jane Goodall at the start of a unique new documentary feature film, "The Bullish Farmer," that brings this quote to life.

The farmer is John "John Boy" Ubaldo, a Pound Ridge native who quit his job as a successful Wall Street investment banker in the wake of 9/11. After seriously contemplating a life change, he decided on a major one: Mr. Ubaldo bought 185 acres of land on the Battenkill River in upstate Cambridge, New York, to raise livestock and grow crops according to the traditional tenets of farmers working the same land 100 years before.

That was 15 years ago, and the film, "The Bullish Farmer," is testimony to Mr. Ubaldo's dream of being a successful independent farmer in spite of encountering numerous obstacles put in his way by industrial agriculture, also known as "Big Ag."

This well-crafted film was directed and co-produced by Ken Marsolais, a Katonah resident who has directed and co-produced Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning productions. Bedfordite Nancy Vick wrote and also co-produced the film.

"The Bullish Farmer" has a heart of its own that distinguishes itself by the authenticity of its real-life characters and the subject's sincere joy and fulfillment in the simplicity of a meaningful life.

"I was encouraged when Nancy and Ken asked to tell my story," said Mr. Ubaldo. "People need to know what is in their food and why it's making them sick. I am advocating for all the local farmers who are producing clean food. Food should fuel you, not kill you."

Mr. Ubaldo's goal is to raise delicious and nutritious food for his extended network of family and friends and the residents of northern Westchester who make up his primary



ELLEN BEST PHOTO

John Ubaldo and Ken Marsolais, director and co-producer of "The Bullish Farmer," at the launch of the Indiegogo campaign for the film project on Sunday at the Outpost in Bedford Village.

market. Toward this end, Mr. Ubaldo opened the Outpost in Bedford Village, featuring his meats and produce.

Last Sunday, the Outpost hosted a party to launch an online crowdfunding campaign for the film project on indiegogo.com.

"This is the most important topic of our time: thoughtful food. People need to know before it's too late," Mr. Marsolais said in a statement issued on the campaign. "The Bullish Farmer invites viewers to reconsider the cost that our food choices and farm policies have on the environment, our health and quality of life."

Principal photography and editing of "The Bullish Farmer" have been completed, according to the project's principals. The online campaign aims to raise \$50,000, which will be used to finance the final stages of post-production, market the project and produce a final screener copy for possible screenings at film festivals and for the

general public.

"Being an integrated farm, as opposed to a monocrop or monoculture farm, I'm dealing on a daily basis with everything from small chickens to large black angus cows," Mr. Ubaldo said. "The mornings on the farm start with the chickens, who are really more social and friendly than we realize, unlike the ducks and the geese, who are like the very bad children. They'll be running to the pond and see a turtle on a log, knock him off and keep running. The cows, they're the divas, the real prima donnas. They definitely have an air about them and dealing with them is always on their own terms. Especially when you have to work with them like tagging, you'll find them very unforgiving. Surprisingly, the pigs are probably the most human of all farm animals. They really communicate with you, whether they are in a good mood or cranky. They'll let you know about it."

This farmer's sensitivity to his animals runs deep. When one of his grass fed cows or Berkshire pigs (all called by name) are ready for slaughter, John Boy personally escorts the animal to the facility, where it spends a quiet night being thanked for its existence and for the role it will then play in providing food and sustenance.

Over the last two decades northern Westchester County and the greater Hudson Valley have benefited from the start of many small independent farms providing the public with healthier food choices.

However, over the same period in New York state alone, more than 500,000 acres of farmland have been converted to farms growing genetically modified organism crops. The result has been the shutting down of 5,000 small farms in the process.

The agriculture industry and the U.S. Farm Bureau have launched a campaign including \$15 billion in subsidies urging small farmers to adopt GMO crops and practices, at the same time that more and more countries are banning it. In response, Mr. Ubaldo has become a passionate and outspoken activist lobbying for GMO labeling, animal rights, the preservation of crop diversity, and the reduction of chemical fertilizers to help preserve small farms and rural America.

With the beauty of rural upstate New York farmland as a backdrop, "The Bullish Farmer" offers a knowledgeable immersion in small-scale farming, and raises crucial questions about the ethics of what the government and the agriculture industry is asking us to accept as nutritious food for our families. This film is important for people to see.

"It's been said that once in your life you need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman and a preacher," shared Mr. Ubaldo. "But every day, three times a day, you need a farmer."

For more information, visit thebullishfarmer.com.