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## Film Globally, Act Locally

**The Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute brings films from around the world**

By: [Charlotte Jusinski](#) 03/11/2009

Wednesdays in the Railyard aren't exactly the busiest night of the week. I almost expect the proverbial tumbleweed to blow across Montezuma as I walk toward the New Mexico Film Museum—formerly known as the Jean Cocteau Theater. Once inside, the tiny lobby holds six people, which fills it just about to capacity.

In the movie house, which only seats about 125 people, the crowd is a mostly homogenous-looking herd of middle-aged, casually dressed inteligenia murmuring amongst themselves. Joanne Smogor, the outreach and communications director of the [Farmers Market Institute](#) and the organizer of its [film series](#), introduces sponsors—dentists, soap-makers and caterers, to name a few—and points out a few bona fide farmers. At 25 and 23 years old, respectively, my boyfriend and I are the youngest people there. The screen is small enough that, even though some of the only seats left are in the second row, we aren't concerned about having to crane our necks back. It'll be like watching the TV at home, only with more people around.

We've come out for the monthly installment of the movie series. The last movies I've seen in theaters have been, admittedly, *The Dark Knight*, because everyone else was doing it, and *Appaloosa*, because it was filmed in New Mexico—but here I am, at a movie that fulfills neither of those qualifications.

**Garbage: The Revolution Starts at Home** is a relatively low-budget documentary about the MacDonaldis, a Toronto family convinced to be the guinea pigs in a sado-masochistic experiment: They must keep their garbage for three months. The movie starts out innocently enough, showing the husband and wife and their three young children as they pick out industrial garbage cans, test thick plastic bags and figure out how to get around health code violations.

Director Andrew Nisker takes the viewer to landfills, recycling centers and to the heart of Toronto's multi-million dollar "wet garbage" processing plant—a place where Canadians' food scraps, paper towels and kitty litter are processed into composting material. We learn about phosphates in our laundry detergent, heavy metals in our bodies, and how communities in Michigan deal with being the dumpster to Canada's trash. The narrative then takes us to West Virginia, where residents in coal mining towns have had their homes, schools and lungs destroyed by the coal plants that supply Toronto's power.

But why show this movie in Santa Fe? In fact, none of the movies shown thus far by the movie series, which is in its fourth year, take place in Santa Fe. Sure, the film was interesting—as the aforementioned homogenous crowd would attest. But this family is in Toronto. They eat refined grains and use Tide laundry detergent, which probably made some movie viewers' toes curl as they clutched their sustainable-bamboo-fiber Mrs. Meyer's-scented sweaters around them.

To bring the movie full-circle and localize the issue, Justin Stockdale, a private consultant with Resource Revival, and E Gifford Stack of the New Mexico Environment Department's Solid Waste Bureau, who have decades of solid waste management between them, speak to the audience about Santa Fe's trash and recycling programs.

Film viewers are invited to share their thoughts and ask questions pertaining to the topic, and there is some talk thrown around about "Those People." No, we're not talking about the subjects of the documentary; we're talking about the mysterious "Other," the uneducated ones who Don't Recycle or who Waste Water or who Buy Excess Packaging. Some moviegoers cannot understand the ignorance of these unmentionables who are not as hip to the environment as the theater's denizens that evening. Some moviegoers vow to dedicate their lives (or at least a few hours a month) to educating others about what can be done to change the fate of the planet.

My boyfriend and I later wonder jokingly if perhaps these environmental crusaders, these proponents of solid waste justice, are concerned about their karma or jockeying to get into heaven ahead of each other.

After the group discussion ends and the crowd is directed to the lobby for homemade (packaging-free) snacks, I leap up and ask Stockdale my one single burning solid waste question: Out of the seven numerical designations of plastics, why can I only recycle ones and twos? Why can't I just throw any old plastic into the recycling bin? Oh, how it hurts to throw my yogurt cups in the trash can!

Stockdale says that, while other places may accept recyclable items of any designation, most places can only find a market to re-sell plastics labeled one or two. If the powers that be can't re-sell what they're pulping up or melting down, why put it anywhere but a landfill? According to Stockdale, while recyclers will take away my yogurt cups in my home state of New Jersey, it's quite possible they then load my yogurt cups onto another truck and send it to a landfill, right under my nose. Whereas I'd thought Santa Fe either lacked the facilities to process everything, or perhaps simply lacked the initiative to try, Stockdale assures me otherwise. It turns out that it's all about the money. And there's no money in recycling—unless it's ones and twos, and sometimes not even then.

There is no surefire way, then, to make sure the things that come in my front door are definitely serving some benevolent purpose when they go out the back door. The key to being environmentally friendly is not recycling; it's simply generating less waste, as impossible as it may seem.

The crowd in the lobby is animated and cheery, discussing their solid waste woes or composting habits, eating treats and snagging pencils, brought by Stack, which are made out of recycled tires, blue jeans and dollar bills. I, however, am ready to leave. I have learned a lot, and I need to process the knowledge into useable material—much like the mashed-up baby diapers and celery stalks in the plant in Toronto.

I need to go get a milkshake in a Styrofoam cup and then, consequently, think about what I'd just done.

Smogor says the Farmers Market Institute's movie series is a tool for education. The films it shows—about the disappearance of honeybees, community gardens in South Central LA, or the plight of the electric car—aim to educate the public about something it didn't know before. I can certainly attest that I know something I didn't know before: namely, that Santa Fe's recycling system isn't insidious, necessarily; it's simply more honest than New Jersey's.

I ask Smogor, "Do these films really make a difference? Do people change?"

She replies that, after the May 2008 showing of *The Silence of the Bees*, a number of viewers were so moved by the movie, which detailed the steady disappearance of bees, that they actually went home and became beekeepers (see page 38). All because of a movie.

All because of a movie, I will continue to drive my recycling the 10 miles it takes to get to the Buckman Transfer Station, and I'll be a little less bitter when I can only throw ones and twos in the giant tractor-trailer-sized bins. But I'll also question why I can't throw more in or, more esoterically, why we have to throw it in at all. And I'll definitely go to the next movie.

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