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**In conversation with Norman Lofts**

Posted by **Sarah Gopaul** at 08:30 PM ET

The ninth edition of the Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival wrapped this Sunday, having screened over 100 of the world's best films on a wide range of environmental themes and subjects by Canadian and international filmmakers. Awards were handed out prior to the final screening and Norman Lofts was presented with the Canadian Long Form Award for his documentary [\*Michael Schmidt: Organic Hero or Bioterrorist\*](#). The film features the Ontario farmer and raw milk activist who is currently making headlines with his legal battle for the right to sell raw milk and the consumer's right to choose. I had a chance to speak with Lofts a few days later.

First point of business was to congratulate him. "Thank you, thank you," Lofts replied humbly. "It was totally unexpected. I was just sitting there. I didn't realize it was going to happen."

One question that had to be asked was did Lofts have a personal interest in Schmidt's story prior to shooting; i.e. is he a raw milk consumer? "No, I'm not a raw milk consumer. I'm not even a milk consumer. I think I'm the best person to make the film because I don't drink milk." Lofts was actually made aware of the issue the way most other Canadians were - he saw the newspaper article detailing the raid on Schmidt's farm by 25-armed police officers. His shock convinced him to follow the story's developments. "I thought I'm just going to start to follow this story with my camera and see how it unfolds, see if there's a real story here. I started to do that... and I could see that [Michael] was a really interesting, charismatic character and that's what you need to make a story work. So I finally approached him and had that first interview about three weeks after the raid."

That was two years ago. "It's going to be an ongoing story for many years before I think Michael can get anywhere near the goal he is trying to reach. And we'll see what happens to him before that: will he end up in jail; will they shutdown his farm? But I really wanted to get out an initial film and documentary about Michael.

"There is a broader story here. In 45 minutes, you can't get into everything. But it is important that people start to think about the source of their food."

An equally important question addressed an element obviously missing from the documentary. Why did Lofts interview several people from the scientific and medical community who were firmly against the consumption of unpasteurized milk but no one from the same community is shown speaking in favour of it? "Well, that's because it's very difficult to find somebody from the medical and government health unit who will talk about raw milk." Lofts explained that even Schmidt's lawyers failed to find anyone, from the U.S. or Canada, willing to testify at his trial in January. The problem is compounded by the lack of financial support for research into the benefits of raw milk.

Lofts is seeking funding to release a sequel to *Organic Hero or Bioterrorist*, which would encompass Schmidt's trial as well as expand the focus to other issues, such as the summer passing of a law in Quebec that rescinds the 60-day aging period for raw milk cheeses from

artisanal producers. "It won't be just another story about the continuing saga of Michael Schmidt."

Lofts is also looking at building on his interest in food documentaries with a more general look at the problems with "sustainable organic nutritious healthy food" or as Michael Pollan says, "real food." With all the recalls and label deception, Lofts poses the question: "Why haven't Canadian consumers turned their backs on industrial food more and embraced real food?"

If you missed *Michael Schmidt: Organic Hero or Bioterrorist* at Planet in Focus or on CBC Newsworld Tuesday night, "The Lens" will be re-airing it in January, closer to Schmidt's trial date.