

## The Biggest Little Farm

This heart-warming documentary chronicles the eight-year quest of the Chester family of Los Angeles to achieve a long-time dream: to launch and maintain a modest, but diverse, well-rounded American farm. They are additionally motivated by having to find a roaming space for their noisy dog Todd, who barks his way too insistently through city life. With luck and pluck, John, a cinematographer, and Molly, a chef, locate 200 acres of barren, despoiled farmland about an hour from Los Angeles and begin "Apricot Lane Farm," their experiment to live in bountiful harmony with nature

With John as our narrator, we are taken year by dogged year through the Chesters' revitalizing their land, much aided by a ready supply of volunteer farmhands and especially, a grizzled "food consultant" named Alex York, full of cryptic but practical advice. Over time, they plant 10,000 orchard trees and over 200 different crops, exquisitely balanced, and they raise dozens of farm animals of every kind, including a singular breeder pig named Emma and her ready companion, Greasy the rooster. Emma's offspring provide one commercial crop, pork, while the farm's prime income comes from their organically grown fruits, headed by peaches sold at local farmers' markets.

The Chesters exhibit dogged perseverance encountering numerous setbacks over the years, from wolves killing their sheep, through insects invading their fruit trees, to rain storms wracking their fields. Still, with patience and resolve, they unlock an exquisite overall biodiverse design which we view in several magical cinematic panoramas, an Edenic farm lovingly realized on screen (It doesn't hurt that John, the pro cinematographer, controls the rich imagery throughout).

One missing piece of this documentary: where did their money come from, not only for the land but for the myriad improvements and investments they must make over the years? The land purchase is glossed over by saying they "found investors," and one wonders if their ongoing expenses could really be covered by selling the farm's produce. Still, these are quibbles regarding "The Biggest Little Farm;" the Chester's film is a contemporary rhapsody of what a sustainable farm can be and a wonderful dream realized.

*(Now out in selected cinemas, the film is rated "PG" and runs 91 mins).*

(May 2019)