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**Intl. Documentary Fest**

Posted: Fri., Dec. 23, 2005, 2:13pm PT

**Our Daily Bread**

*Unser Taeglich Brot*  
(Documentary -- Austria)

A Nikolaus Geyrhalter Filmproduktion GmbH production, made with the support of Film Fonds Wien, Film Institute, 3SAT, ZDF. (International sales: Outlook, Vienna.) Produced by Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Michael Kitzberger, Wolfgang Widerhofer. Directed by Nikolaus Geyrhalter. Dramatic structure, Wolf

By **LESLIE FELPERIN**

Stripped of [voiceover](#), interviews or obvious editorial stance, questing helmer Nikolaus Geyrhalter's evocative [docu](#) "Our Daily Bread" looks at the agricultural industry across Europe through sound and images alone. Pic offers a *tabula rasa* in which some auds will see a horrifying indictment of the industry's cruelties, others a realistic depiction of mechanized farming, and some a soft-spoken tribute to manual labor. Meanwhile, precisely composed lensing and painstaking sound design create moments of sublime beauty, even when showing the production line slaughter of animals. "Bread" should make rich food for thought at further fests before being digested by upmarket TV stations.

Composed of images of unnamed workers and anonymous places from across the continent, "Bread" never lets viewers know quite where they are, in marked contrast to Geyrhalter's previous pics, such as "Elsewhere" and "Pripyat," in which locals' stories and insights build up portraits of specific locales.

Strategy here is deliberately fashioned to emphasize the impersonal nature of contempo farming, turning workers into cogs in vast, semi-organic machines.

Nevertheless, almost every sequence showing a different agricultural process tends to end with shots of the laborers having a meal or beverage break -- moments that underscore humanity of the folk shown and the fact

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that all this is ultimately about creating sustenance.

Although images visually rhyme with each other, and some sense of climax and closure is achieved by the end, there's no particular narrative as such. Particular shots and scenes linger in isolation in the memory afterward, for instance, of a mechanical arm that shakes all the olives from a tree in seconds, huge hangar-like spaces lined with shelves full of battery hens or rows and rows of tomato plants receding to a vanishing point in the distance, or the sight of a cow caught in a holding contraption who in its panic tries to avoid the fatal bolt to its head as its dead herdmates trail away into the distance on a conveyor belt.

Although Georges Franju's harrowing 1949 docu short on slaughterhouses, "Blood of the Beasts," reps one obvious touchstone here, this is not an infomercial for vegetarianism. Geyrhalter lets auds draw their own conclusions.

According to the pic's press notes, agricultural companies that allowed filming on their premises were happy to give viewers a glimpse of their punctiliously sterile workplaces and the sophisticated mechanical kit used to make food. The intrinsic majesty of the landscapes, however estranged they may be from their natural state, compels consistently.

Long held, wide-angle shots, limpidly lensed on HDcam by Geyrhalter himself, are often taken from the prow of tractors or cranes and are used to create an eerie, machine-eye traveling view of fields and spaces. The static shots, almost always long or medium shots, have a more painterly quality, particularly the portrait shots of workers at rest, their off-center composition and use of light sometimes recalling Vermeer paintings.

Likewise, sound is used sparingly, noises from other scenes laid over different sequences to create a faintly disturbing alienation effect. Rest of the tech package is impeccable.

Camera (color, HDCam-to-35mm), Geyrhalter; editor, Widerhofer; sound (Dolby Digital), Stefan Holzer, Andreas Hamza, Hjalti Bager-Jonathansson, Ludwig Löckinger, Heimo Korak, Nicole Scherg; sound designer, Andreas Hamza. Reviewed at Intl. Documentary Festival Amsterdam (Joris Ivens competition), Nov. 11, 2005. Running time: 92 MIN. (German, Arabic dialogue)



Nikolaus Geyrhalter's spare docu 'Our' the agricultural industry across Europ images alone.

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