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DRYLAND

Synopses and Film Quotes

Short Logline “A” – 3 words

Cultivating rural resilience

Short Logline “B” – 5 words

Elbow grease & axle grease

Logline – 17 words

A small town in the American West struggles for survival, fueled by ingenuity, heart, and axle grease.

Long Logline – 50 words

Filmed over a decade and set in the American West, *Dryland* traces a young man's quest for victory in a rambunctious contest while battling to save a threatened way of life. The Lind Combine Demolition Derby pits steel and wit against rural decline—fueled by ingenuity, heart, and axle grease.

Short synopsis – 103 words

Filmed over a decade and set in the American West, *Dryland* traces a young man's quest for victory in a rambunctious contest, while battling to preserve a threatened way of life. This cinematic meditation on the fate of rural America reveals a paradoxical struggle between technological advancement and ongoing rural decline. Josh Knodel and best friend Matt Miller strive to win the Lind Combine Demolition Derby, save their town, and preserve the legacy of their families' Eastern Washington wheat farms. Bittersweet yet exuberant, *Dryland* champions hope, in a celebration of hard work and harder play, fueled by ingenuity, heart, and axle grease.

Medium synopsis – 316 words

Filmed over a decade and set in the American West, *Dryland* traces a young man's quest for victory in a rambunctious contest, while battling to preserve an endangered way of life. Josh Knodel and best friend Matt Miller strive to win the Lind Combine Demolition Derby, help save their town, and preserve the legacy of their families' Eastern Washington wheat farms.

The derby supports Lind through dry years and economic uncertainty. The tiny town of 500 swells to 5,000 for one day each year and, with barn-raising fervor, funds critical local services. Paradoxically, as agricultural technology advances, allowing for more efficient production, the need for labor decreases and fewer young farmers can remain on the land. Higher costs force farms to consolidate or grow, and many family farms and the rural towns depending on them to simply disappear.

Galvanizing optimism and strategy, Josh and Matt rebuild their combine “JAWS” each year to vie for the derby title, just as they plan for the year's harvest. But even as Josh leads “JAWS” to victory, he's defeated in his lifelong passion to work the fields his great-grandfather first tilled, and he is forced to leave the farm to find a job.

A visceral, cinematic duet of hard work and harder play, *Dryland* meditates on the changing landscape of rural communities, filling an important niche in the conversation around what Farm Aid calls the “Good food movement.” With a worldwide groundswell of interest in food systems—from local eating to urban farmcraft—*Dryland* offers an authentic story about living on the land.

Called “a bittersweet and beautiful new film” by *Modern Farmer Magazine*, *Dryland* ultimately champions hope, in a what Farm Aid terms “a raucous celebration of the culture of agriculture and an honest look at the reality of family farming.” *Dryland* offers a hearty antidote to the threat of rural decline, fueled by ingenuity, heart, and axle grease.

Long Synopsis – 479 words

Filmed over a decade and set in the American West, *Dryland* traces a young man’s quest for victory in a rambunctious contest, while battling to save a threatened way of life. Josh Knodel and his best friend Matt Miller dream of winning the Lind Combine Demolition Derby—a boisterous, agrarian spectacle—while striving to stay on their families’ Eastern Washington wheat farms. Now that Josh is 18, he’s finally able to take his chances with JAWS, a hulking, out-of-retirement wheat harvester, in the arena. But the changing landscape of small-scale agriculture places their future—as well as the fate of Lind—in peril.

The derby supports Lind through dry years and economic uncertainty. The tiny town of 500 swells to 5,000 for one day each year and, with barn-raising community spirit, funds critical local services. Paradoxically, as agricultural technology advances, promoting more efficient production, the need for human labor decreases and fewer young farmers can stay on the land. Higher equipment and materials costs force farms to consolidate or grow, and many family farms and the rural towns depending on them simply disappear.

Galvanizing optimism, strategy, and elbow grease, Josh and Matt rebuild JAWS each year, taking turns in the drivers’ seat to vie for the derby title. They complete high school, then college, preparing to assume leadership roles on their farms. But even as Josh leads JAWS to victory, he’s defeated in his lifelong passion to harvest the fields his great-grandfather first tilled, and he is forced to leave the farm to find a job.

In this arid, amber land, place forges identity and labor fuels dreams. The Lind Combine Demolition Derby serves as a metaphor for the struggles many rural Americans face: “*Duct tape in the front, haywire in the back, bubble gum in the middle,*” describes the typical derby combine—but it also represents the resilience, innovation, and tenacity required to farm.

Dryland is at its core a meditation—albeit at times a pretty loud one—on the passion that young farmers in a remote Western region express, either out in the fields or in the throes of the combine derby, to maintain a legacy of small-scale agriculture and stay in place. We want to dignify contemporary rural life through thoughtful characters and a visually elegant treatment. Mark Orton’s (*Nebraska*, *The Good Girl*, *Sweet Land*) original score evokes just the right balance of tones, whether bittersweet, comedic, or reflective, and John Mellencamp’s “Longest Days” offers a poignant underpinning to Josh’s pending departure. Over the credits, in “John Deere Tractor Song,” the late Don Walser reminds us of the bond between farmer and machine.

In this visceral, cinematic duet of hard work and harder play, Josh and Matt join forces to unite their community and propel the legacy of the American family farm. Balancing exuberance and reflection, and bittersweet at times, *Dryland* ultimately champions hope, fueled by ingenuity, heart, and axle grease.

Quotes from Dryland characters

“The wheat was green, summer fallow was made and brown, and derby was just around the corner.”

“I’ve spent every birthday since I was 12 in the seat of a combine. And this’ll be the first year that I won’t spend my birthday driving combine for my dad.”

I don’t know what it’s going to be like down the road...you know, nobody knows that...but, I hope that down the road, when my turn comes, that the opportunity is still there.”

“There’s not a lot of people who can actually say they are doing what they’ve dreamed of doing. So, no...it’s good.”

–Josh Knodel, wheat farmer, derby combine driver, and main character in Dryland

“The big key is to not get trapped, and not get bogged down by two or three combines that pinch you in and then can hammer away at you—to stay aloof, and do your own hitting...and then get away.”

“You have to be an optimist when you are a farmer. In order to do this stressful business, you’d better be optimistic, and you’d better enjoy what you do, or else you have no business being here.”

–Jerry Knodel, wheat farmer and Josh’s dad

“Ultimately, as a family farm, you would want your children to be able to stay and farm, and carry on that tradition. I think that’s with all of the family farms in this community. And some farms are able to do that, and some aren’t able to do that.”

–Debbie Knodel, Josh’s mom

“You go out there, and it’s pretty nerve-wracking. I mean, even though these are going eight, nine miles an hour when you’re hitting somebody, it seems pretty fast.”

–Brian Finch, derby combine driver

“Well, I was raised on a farm, my folks made a living with it. They raised six of us on the farm. And it’s really in my blood—dirt’s in my blood, I can’t shake it. When you can see the production and so forth going... you’re feeding mankind. Hey, it’s just a natural thing. And you grow up in it, and you can’t get rid of it! You gotta live with it.”

–Ruben Fode, wheat farmer