



A Thousand Pines

A film by Noam Osband & Sebastián Díaz

World Premiere

2023 New York Latino International Film Festival

www.athousandpinesfilm.com

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USA, 2023, 74 min. In English and Spanish with English subtitles.

LOGLINE

In this tale of labor and family that shines a light on the precarity of temporary work visas, Raymundo Morales leads a crew of workers who have to make the challenging decision to leave their families in rural Mexico to plant commercial pine forests in the United States.

SYNOPSIS

A Thousand Pines shows the lives of migrants who depend on the controversial guest worker visa program, following a crew of workers from Oaxaca, Mexico over the course of a season planting trees throughout the United States. The crew struggles to balance the job's physical demands and its extreme isolation while remaining connected to their families back home. As the season progresses, they become a small family, cooking and caring for each other in order to endure the punishing work. The film centers on the crew foreman, Raymundo Morales, who is in his 19th season working for the largest reforestation company in the US. When he began, he was single and had few responsibilities. Now, however, he must balance his obligations to his wife, his children, and his elderly mother with a heart condition, while also tending to the needs and emergencies of the planting crew. Spending only three months at home during the off-season, Raymundo's job is both the family's salvation and its heartbreak.

CREDITS

Directors and Producers: Noam Osband & Sebastián Díaz

Executive Producers: Catherine Tambini, Sally Jo Fifer, Sandie Viquez
Pedlow, Lois Vossen

Production Company: A Thousand Pines Film LLC in co-production with
Latino Public Broadcasting, and the Independent
Television Service (ITVS)

Post-Producer: Lila Yomtoob

Story Consultant: Ray Telles

In Association with: Independent Lens, PBS, Berkeley Film Foundation,
Wenner-Gren Foundation, Puffin Foundation.

Cinematographer: Noam Osband

Editor: Angela Reginato

Music: Lila Downs, Fernando Martinez, The Color Forty Nine.

FILM PARTICIPANT BIOS:

[Subjects Headshots](#)

Raymundo Morales

The crew foreman, he is returning for his 20th year of planting. When he started, he was young and single; now he leaves behind a wife, three kids, and an ailing mother with a heart condition. His father passed away while he was planting in the United States, and he wonders if the same thing might happen this season with his mother.

Rodolfo Morales

Raymundo's cousin, he is coming to the USA for his first year of planting. Before leaving, he promised his partner they will marry if he can earn enough to pay off the debts they incurred due to an emergency C-section for his young daughter's delivery.

Juan Garcia

Another rookie planter, he has decided to plant trees in order to raise money for a clothing store he wants to open, but a foot injury suffered early in the season puts those plans in peril.

CREW BIOS:

[Crew Headshots](#)

Noam Osband (Director and Producer)

Noam is a filmmaker, radio producer, and anthropologist based out of San Francisco. His first feature, *Adelante*, a documentary about Mexican immigration to Philadelphia, screened on over 20 PBS affiliates, played at over 30 festivals, and was screened at over 40 colleges. He is also a radio and print journalist, with bylines and credits including The Atlantic, BBC4, Criminal, and more.

Sebastián Díaz (Director and Producer)

Sebastian is a filmmaker and Emmy-awarded editor originally from Mexico. His short documentary *Toñita's* premiered at MoMA Doc Fortnight. His award-winning documentary *Brilliant Soil* has screened internationally. Sebastián was a fellow of the 2020 Latino Media Market with *A Thousand Pines*. He sits on the board of UnionDocs, NYC.

Lila Yomtoob (Post-Producer, Associate Producer)

Lila has been a worker in the media space for 25 years and counting. Her work over

the years includes producing, directing, writing, sound editing, accounting, and post production supervising narrative and documentary features, television and shorts. As a former member of IATSE 700 and 871, one of her goals is to create a culture of collaboration and kindness around her productions.

Angela Reginato (Editor)

Angela is an editor and filmmaker based in Oakland. She has edited documentaries including *Pedro E. Guerrero: A Photographer's Journey* by Ray Telles (PBS American Masters) and *Beyond La Bamba* by Marco Villalobos (Latino Public Broadcasting). She edited *Dolissa Medina's Cartography of Ashes* for the centennial of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, and Anne McGuire's *Oh Hi Anne*, a short film celebrating George Kuchar.

Catherine Tambini (Executive Producer)

Catherine is a filmmaker who works as both a director and a producer. Her credits include Sundance Special Jury Prize winner *Farmingville* (broadcast on POV), Emmy nominated *The State of Arizona* (Independent Lens), Academy-Award nominated *Suzanne Farrell: Elusive Muse* (Great Performances / Dance in America). Catherine is a Sundance Documentary Fund fellow whose work has been supported by the MacArthur Foundation, ITVS, Latino Public Broadcasting, GoodPitch, NYSCA, among many others.

Lila Downs (Music)

An internationally known musician, Lila Downs hails from the same region of Oaxaca as the tree planters in the film, and she provided both new and original music for the film. Her first album, *Ofrenda*, was released in 1994, and she achieved widespread international success in 2001 with the album *Border*. Her albums have sold millions of copies worldwide, and she is a winner of multiple Grammy and Latin Grammy awards, with her latest album winning the 2017 Latin Grammy for Best Traditional Pop Vocal album.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

Noam Osband.

I discovered this story while studying reforestation work for my PhD in anthropology, and the film was born out of the networks and contacts I built during that time. To document Raymundo and his planters, I spent over half a year on the road with this crew, sharing a hotel bed like everyone else and traveling to and from the worksite in the crew van. Only by committing in this fashion was I able to gain access to the private and often painful moments that typify the lives of these planters. My dissertation was a three hour film about American, Canadian, and Mexican tree planters, and after completing the PhD, I decided to try and turn the section about Mexican planters into a standalone film.

Shooting this film was one of the most revelatory journalistic experiences of my life. It's one thing to read that someone plants 5,000 trees a day. It's another thing to view it with your own eyes and see up close what it takes to plant that day after day, to witness the toll that reforestation work takes on bodies and families. After filming this movie, I subsequently worked several seasons myself as a tree planter, and when I tell people about the work, they are often incredulous at just how difficult it is. They also are usually fascinated by the fact that they have never heard about the reforestation industry even though the United States is the world's largest manufacturer of wood products.

Ever since spending the majority of the season with Raymundo and his crew, I have wanted to make a movie that honors the sacrifices of the tree planters, and this primarily vérité film is one way to do that. While it's not the only goal for the film, I earnestly wanted to make a movie that tree planters can show their relatives and say, "This is how it was. This was the job that took me from home all those years. This is what I endured because I love you."

Sebastián Díaz.

Being a proxy to hidden worlds is a privilege. I count myself artistically successful when the subjects have been accurately and respectfully represented and when the story that I tell has been allowed to find its voice, whatever that may be. I am interested in making films that allow for playfulness and daring with genre and style, and which push the boundaries of traditional form as appropriate.

I was drawn to *A Thousand Pines* by curiosity, kinship, and pure aesthetic enjoyment of existing footage intimately shot by my co-director Noam. I knew very little about tree planting or H2B visas. Though not Oaxacan, I am a Mexican immigrant in the US. I empathize with the feelings of isolation as I, too, have navigated family emergencies with the demands of visas and distance. The footage convinced me that a subtle, artistically compelling, and yet accessible film could be made. The strong characters and intimacy of the footage have allowed us to tell a universal story with specificity,

delicacy and precision, instead of generalizations. The hidden world displayed allows the viewer to consider the everyday wood products with new eyes, thinking of the lives, loves, and families of those who make them possible.

Any time an audience feels more connected to the world around them, or feels a new possibility inside themselves, I feel a certain measure of success. However, success for me includes the working experience as well as the end product. It is important to me that those I work with feel valued, appreciated, respected and seen.

Breaking away from conventional narrative structures has required a complex edit and careful direction. Furthermore, co-directing a feature documentary has forced me to articulate preferences clearly, strengthening my own voice. With a public broadcast, thanks to the co-production of ITVS, I'm excited for audiences to be touched by the stories of Raymundo and the other protagonists of *A Thousand Pines*.

ABOUT DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND TEMPORARY WORK VISAS

The United States is the world's largest producer of wood products and each year the industry relies almost entirely on foreign guest workers who plant over one billion trees to replenish harvested forests. Many of America's tree planting contractors were founded by members of the Back-to-the-Land movement in the 1970s—white, self-described hippies who had moved to Arkansas to find a simpler lifestyle in the Ozarks. As the industry boomed, hippies turned into capitalists and small companies turned into million-dollar businesses. Planter salaries plummeted and companies discovered a cheaper workforce: temporary guest workers from Latin America.

The guest worker visas, H-2B non-agricultural and H-2A agricultural temporary worker visas were implemented in the 1980s to provide temporary nonimmigrant workers to replace the infamous Bracero program. Despite growing anti-immigrant rhetoric, the recent labor shortages have driven companies to expand the programs, from 75,000 in 2010 to 372,000 in 2022. The Bracero program was ended in the 1960s due to rampant wage theft, a criticism still made by workers today, with The Center for Migrant Rights (CDM) finding that 43% of migrant workers on H-2A visas [surveyed](#) reported that the salary they received was less than promised. However, since workers on these visas depend on the company for the visa, they are not able to search for other work in the US or seek lost wages. Additional controversy with the expansion of the temporary visa program has come from across the political spectrum, that companies exploit loopholes to hire lower paid and easier to exploit H-2B workers and avoid hiring US residents.