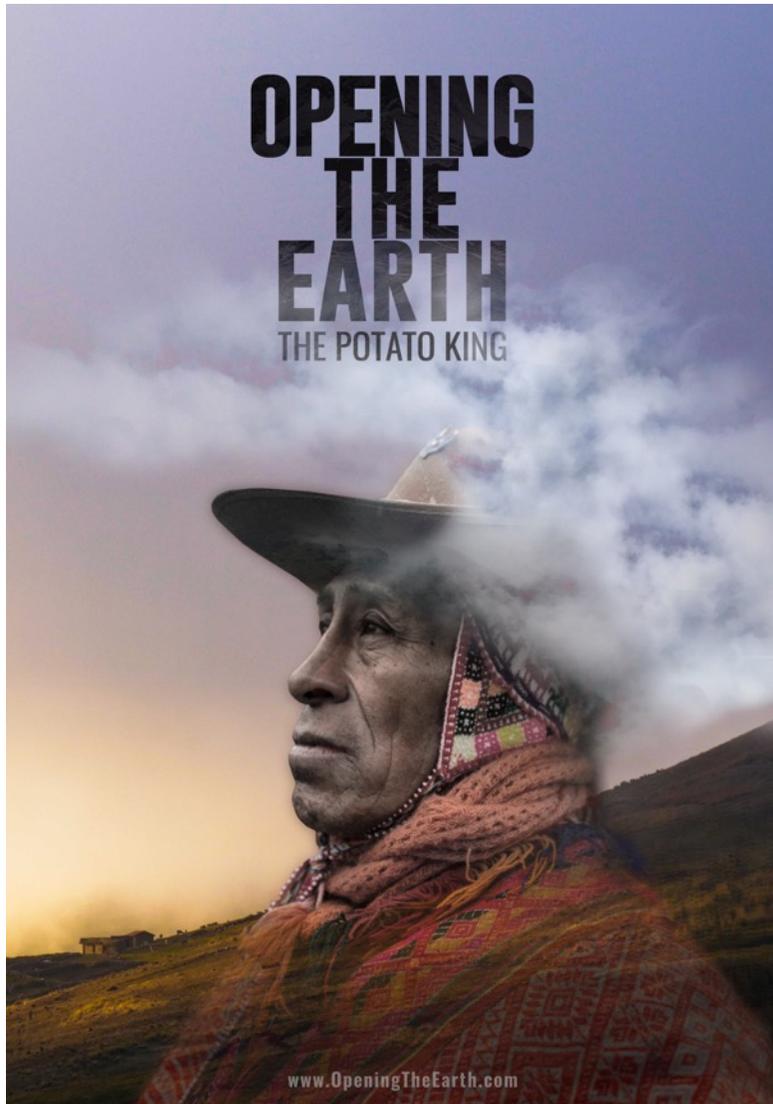


O FILMS in association with
the ANDEAN ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Present

OPENING THE EARTH: THE POTATO KING



50 min. | USA | 2018 www.openingtheearth.com

Media Contact:

O Films

ofilmscontact@gmail.com

Logline

Julio Hanco is a guardian of biodiversity, critical to the survival of humanity. He represents a people, a culture, and way of life that is being lost to modernization. Will their culture survive? Or will it all be lost with the last Potato King?

Long Synopsis

Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a documentary about Julio Hanco, a aging guardian of biodiversity living at 14,600 ft above sea level in the Andes Mountains of Peru. His humble life and rise to international fame is contrasted with the global significance of his work and how the modern world may depend on him in an emergency. Julio Hanco represents a people, a culture, and a way of life that is being lost to modernization. The new generation of Peruvians are losing their desire to farm, more driven to be able to afford material possessions than inherit the land from their ancestors. Opening the Earth: The Potato King follows two young Peruvians on opposite sides of the issue. Hernan Hanco is the Potato King's son, and has chosen to leave his small village for the capital city of Lima, Peru in search of a career and wealth. He has found that the dream of living in the big city isn't always what it is promoted to be. Yenni Quispe-Surco is a young school girl who faces a decision, move to the city to pursue wealth and modern success, or stay in her village and carry on the traditional Quechua lifestyle of her ancestors. The result is a documentary that challenges our perception of poverty and celebrates traditional knowledge.

Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a visually stunning celebration of the indigenous cultures of the Andes Mountains and what they can teach us in today's modern society.

Medium Synopsis

Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a documentary about Julio Hanco, a guardian of biodiversity living at 14,600 ft above sea level in the Andes Mountains of Peru. His humble life is contrasted with the global significance of his work and how the modern world may depend on him in an emergency. Julio Hanco represents a people, a culture, and a way of life that is being lost to modernization. The new generation of Peruvians are losing their desire to farm, more driven to be able to afford cars and houses than inherit the land from their ancestors. We follow two young Peruvians on opposite sides of the issue. Hernan Hanco (the Potato King's son) has left his small village for the capital city of Lima, Peru in search of a career and wealth. Yenni Quispe-Surco is a young girl who faces a decision, move to the city to pursue wealth and modern success, or stay in her village and carry on the traditional Quechua lifestyle. The result is a documentary that challenges our perception of poverty and celebrates indigenous culture.

Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a visually stunning celebration of the indigenous cultures of the Andes Mountains and what they can teach us in today's modern society.

Short Synopsis

Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a documentary about Julio Hanco, a guardian of biodiversity living in the Andes Mountains of Peru. His humble life is contrasted with the global significance of his work. Julio Hanco represents a people, a culture, and a way of life that is being lost to modernization. The youth want to leave the farming communities in search for a better life. The documentary follows two young Peruvians on opposite sides of this issue. The result is a documentary that challenges our perception of poverty and celebrates traditional knowledge. Opening the Earth: The Potato King is a visually stunning celebration of the indigenous cultures of the Andes Mountains and what they can teach us in today's modern society.

Director's Statement

For my brother Aaron and I, this is more than just a documentary. This is a culmination of both of our careers intersecting to create one beautiful statement that we want to make to the world. *Opening the Earth: The Potato King* is a passion project about a man who represents more than just himself. It is a story two years in the making; we hope the impact will last much longer.

For years Aaron and I had talked about making some sort of small documentary or video series together. We both studied and loved photography and visual arts, but had never made anything together. Aaron was constantly finding interesting stories to tell in his region of Peru, but we had no effective way to share these stories. In 2016 I quit my job to pursue my passion of visual storytelling. While I was in Mexico, Aaron approached me and said he had finally found *the* story. The story of Julio Hanco and his rise to be known internationally as The Potato King. I was fresh off wrapping what would go on to be my international award-winning short documentary *The Bull*. I was ready for the next step. With the help of our Producer and Art Director Jenna, we launched a Kickstarter Campaign to raise money to fund this film. Knowing that at the end of the day we still wanted to take advantage of this opportunity, funding or not, I took a flight down to Peru. We were two weeks into shooting when the Kickstarter was officially funded.

What we thought would take four months ended up taking 2 years. Once we saw the beauty of the imagery and the potential of this story, we enlisted the help of Paul J Lynch, a veteran filmmaker who guided us through the storytelling process. Throughout the next 2 years we experienced so much with the people of the Andes Mountains. We slept in their yards, herded animals with their children, drank Chicha(fermented corn beer) with their families, and of course harvested potatoes. Lots of potatoes.

Aaron and the Andean Alliance have been working in these communities for the last 10 years. The trust that these communities have for Aaron and his organization is the foundation for this documentary. The access we were able to receive would not be possible to anyone else, especially a filmmaker showing up out of the blue. Their trust in the Andean Alliance is warranted, and you can see that trust in some of the vulnerable moments captured in the documentary.

Opening the Earth: The Potato King tells the story of Julio Hanco, the hardened potato farmer who lives as his ancestors did. He is getting older, and his culture is being lost along with his strength. This film also tells the story of two Peruvian youth who are at opposite ends of the desire to leave their farming

communities. But this documentary also tells another story, a message that transcends the individual and could apply to all indigenous cultures across the world. With this documentary, we aim to highlight the strengths and resilience of these communities, and show the traditional knowledge that they possess. These communities have been living on and with the land for millennium. The knowledge that they have developed is scientific, based on centuries of experimentation. As modern civilizations, we are overlooking this knowledge and we are losing all the benefits that these traditional cultures have to offer us. We shouldn't view these communities as poor and needing our help, we should view them as allies, teachers to help us become better, more well rounded citizens of the earth. We should value and celebrate the traditional knowledge that they possess, and the culture they come from. This is the real story that we want to tell. A message bigger than us as Directors, a message bigger than our documentary. We hope you receive that message.

-Eric Ebner



Q&A with the Directors

The cinematography in Opening the Earth: The Potato King is very unique. What would you say is the visual style for this film?

Eric: When we started shooting we didn't have any preconceived notions of what we wanted the film to look like, but we knew we wanted a few main components. I've always been an advocate for capturing details. I believe creating a sense of environment really gives the viewer a better understanding of where the characters are living and how it affects them. So with Opening the Earth we wanted to really highlight the little moments and little details that add up to a larger picture. We knew we wanted a widescreen film, and we knew we wanted to create an engaging, exotic, almost tangible sense of environment. As the shooting went on our vision came more into focus. At the end of the day it all came down to visually recreating the reality that we experienced. I can't speak for how Julio Hanco sees his own landscape. But I can speak to how I see it as an outsider. And as an outsider I was constantly blown away by what I was witnessing. So we tried to recreate that sensation for the viewer. The landscape in the Andes is very extreme, often damp and cold. Clouds and wind are a constant, as is blinding sun. We wanted to let the viewer experience those extremes, and get lost in the details. Some of my favorite shots are when Julio Hanco is digging with his hands into the soil to pull out potatoes. Or shots of a lightbulb hanging from the only wire in the house. Those details add up to a larger picture, like hints to the reality of their lives. This involved a lot of low aperture, low light shots that ended up being visually arresting and effective in our storytelling. But in the moments between these extreme conditions are beautiful, quiet moments that one would think only exist thousands of years ago. So it was a challenge to balance the rugged details while also capturing the serenity of the bigger picture of their existence. Drone cinematography was crucial in being able to show the context of their lives in the mountains. There is just no way we could capture the sense of scale without it. We were always cognizant of the Apus, Pitusiray in the background. A lot of our shots were focused with the Mountain God looking down at us, as it is such an important part of Julio's life.

When it came to the capital city of Lima, we were committed to continuing our visual style, but with a very different environment. We tried to define a city of 9 million in the same way we described a village of 200. Showing the reality of life there so the viewer could maybe imagine the struggles and difficulties of moving

to a intimidating metropolis from a small humble village. Drone cinematography was important once again to balance out the macro level shots with the expansive shots of the city. There is a transition where we go from a aerial shot of a group of sheep running through the valley to a expanding shot of the inner city of Lima, and I think it is very effective in contrasting these two different environments.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced?

Eric: In my opinion, the biggest challenge we faced was how to tell this story. There are so many way we could have gone about it, and it was overwhelming as a Editor. What is the best way to tell multiple, interweaving storylines into one cohesive journey? It was a huge learning experience that resulted in us rearranging the entire documentary countless times. We have anywhere from 5-7 characters that help tell all angles of our story, and they all have different perspectives that we wanted to share. To do this in a efficient manner while also keeping the viewer engaged and inspired was daunting for me personally. Luckily we had a lot of help from our Producer Paul Lynch from Cage Free Productions, and he was a huge help in focusing what we needed to say and the best way to say it. Often times I would get lost in the editing and couldn't take a step back and see the larger picture of the storyline we were building. Aaron and Paul were crucial in that aspect, they could see things that I could not. We probably rearranged the film significantly over 6 times. Every time it was overwhelming, but every time the film improved.

The documentary mentions how Julio Hanco the Potato King doesn't trust foreigners. How did he react to you and the filming of this documentary?

Eric: I first met Julio a day before we started shooting. It was very apparent that he was guarded when he interacted with me. This was a bit stressful for me because not only did I want him to like me, but to tell great story we need the vulnerable truth. Those first few days I made sure to just lay low and be as respectful as possible, so he could get to know me. I knew he had been betrayed in the past by foreigners, so I wanted to do everything I could to gain his trust. Luckily, Aaron has been working in Julio's community for the last 10 years, so I could come in as an accessory to someone he already had trust in. It was obvious they had a rapport, so I just tried to build off of that. I think after Julio saw how Aaron and I worked, and especially how we joked around as brothers, he became much more at ease. It was a fun experience to go through the entire spectrum of him maybe not trusting

me, to us showing up with his favorite beer and just hanging out for awhile before we started working.

What surprised you during the making of this film? Was there anything that you didn't see coming?

Eric: What surprised me most during the development of the film was Yenni Quispe's role in the story. She completely caught us off guard and we both were just blown away by the person she was. We interviewed Yenni and her brothers early in filming, hoping to get a little bit of information about how most of the youth would rather leave for the cities than stay in their villages. Her brothers interviews were okay, nothing that I was very excited about. Then we interviewed Yenni, not expecting much, and we were blown away. The way that she speaks and the wisdom that she has at such a young age is just incredible. She was saying things that, as a director and editor, I could only imagine in my dreams. She really has a old soul, and her speech is poetic in a way that you can't fabricate. She just understands things differently than most, and her character shines through in her interviews and when she is on the screen. She went from an after thought to my favorite character within 10 minutes. During the shooting we kept going back to her for more perspective, and her role in the story grew and grew. I never saw that coming.

Have the community members in Pampacorral, Peru seen this film? What do you hope they get from this documentary?

Aaron: As of now the community members of Pampacorral have not seen the film. I screened the kickstarter trailer at a community assembly in 2017. We will be working with our staff in the near future, translating the film into Quechua so that they can all see what we've been working on. I want the community members to see a visually beautiful perspective on their lives. I want them to feel proud of their heritage and understand that their traditions are not only beautiful but critical to humanity.

On the flip side, what do you hope the western audience will take from this film?

Aaron: I want western audiences to see this film and take a critical look at their lives and their preconceptions. I want foreign audiences to realize that the life of a campesino is a beautiful way of life. I also want foreigners to value indigenous culture and respect the traditions that have given us so much.

There is a surprise ending in *Opening The Earth: The Potato King*, can you tell us a little bit about that?

Eric: Absolutely not! Everyone will just have to see it for themselves. Hopefully the very aware viewers can see hints of the ending throughout the film. But there's only one way to find out!



Film Crew

Eric Ebner- Director, Cinematographer, Editor

Eric is a international award-wining filmmaker and founder of O Films from Marshall, MI. His premiere short film, The Bull has shown in over 14 countries and is currently on tour with the Save the Waves Coalition. Eric now lives and works in the Sacred Valley of the Incas in Peru as a independent filmmaker and photographer.



Aaron Ebner- Director, Writer, Cinematographer

Aaron is the co-founder and executive director of the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development in the Andes of Peru. Aaron has dedicated a decade of his life to living and working in high altitude campesino communities. The work of the Alianza Andina has impacted national policy and trained thousands to take pride in indigenous culture and challenge perceptions of poverty. Aaron lives on a small farm in the Peruvian Andes.



Jenna Semenoff- Producer, Art Director

Jenna is a web developer and designer from Nelson, British Columbia, Canada where she co-founded the Sandwich Collective in 2010. The Sandwich Collective supports marketing and internet presence for organizations globally.



Paul J. Lynch- Producer, Writer

As Founder & CEO of Cage Free Productions, a certified B Corp, Paul consults foundations, social businesses, and non-profits while building The Vision of the Movement to support social justice, human rights, and sustainability. The work of CFP is engaged in projects both locally and globally to address the challenges of the 21st Century. As an educator and professional, he sits on the faculty of Antioch University's MBA program and serves as an advisor and board member on various non-profit boards. Paul continues to explore his passion for research and filmmaking, which to date has led his to more than 45 countries around the world.



Main Characters



Julio Hanco- The Potato King

Julio Hanco(age unknown) is The Potato King. His knowledge of the tuber has been passed down through his family for generations. He grows over 350 varieties of potatoes without any modern farm equipment or technology. His work is revered by celebrity chefs, intellectuals, and scientists around the world. Julio is illiterate, has no running water and one lightbulb in his house. Yet his life's work is critical to the survival of the human race. In his old age, Julio is wearing down. With no one to pass his knowledge on to, his biodiversity and the traditions of his culture may be lost with him.

Hernan Hanco- Founder- Sumac Chips

Hernan Hanco is the Potato King's son. In his youth, Hernan was tempted to move to the city to follow a more modern career path. In time he realized it was not as glamorous as he hoped. Hernan then collaborated with ANPE Peru to create a small business that would help his father and his home community, Sumac Chips. Sumac Chips makes organic potato chips from his fathers famously diverse potatoes.





Yenni Quispe-Surco- Student

Yenni is a student from the small farming village Chawatiri, Peru. Her father is a potato farmer, unrelated to the Potato King. Yenni is at a crossroads that is very typical for Peruvian youth. After so many years of being told that their indigenous lifestyle is a failure, she experiences a lot of pressure from her parents to leave for the city to achieve “more”. Her heart is with her family and with her countryside, but societal pressures tell her to leave. Yenni’s conflict is central to the story of youth in Peru, and the story of this culture that is being lost with each passing generation.

Moises Quispe- Executive Director of ANPE Peru, the Association of Ecological Products of Peru.

Moises grew up in the rural farming community of Choquecancha, Peru. He then moved to the capital city of Lima and pursued a career in agriculture. ANPE Peru’s mission is to promote and market ecological friendly products coming from the rural farmers of Peru. Moises and ANPE Peru identified Julio Hancco as a guardian of biodiversity in 2001, and has been promoting and working with Julio ever since. ANPE Peru has also supported Julios son, Hernan and his potato organic potato chip business



Aaron Ebner- Co-Founder, Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development

Aaron is the Co-Founder of the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development (Alianza Andina). Aaron is from Marshall, Michigan but has been living in Julio Hanco's region of the Andes Mountains of Peru for over 10 years. The Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development is a Non-profit organization that focuses on agricultural education for indigenous populations in Peru. Aaron gives an outsider's perspective to the documentary, and helps frame and question our western definition of poverty.



David Ellis PH.D.- International Potato Center

Dr. Dave Ellis PH.D. is the Head of the Gene Bank at the International Potato Center (Centro Internacional de la Papa) in Lima, Peru. The International Potato Center (CIP) works in conjunction with the food and agriculture center of the United Nations to preserve genetic diversity in potatoes, sweet potatoes, and Andean tubers. CIP has over 4,000 species cryogenically frozen in case of global emergencies. Dave helps us understand the global importance of biodiversity, and the importance of real farmers like Julio Hanco practicing and experimenting in the field.

Film Stills









Media Coverage

University of San Diego Magazine- Spring 2018

Opening the Earth

Finding Reliance, Strength, and Grace in the Peruvian Andes- By Karen Gross



It's a very long way from the small town of Marshall, Michigan, to the breathtaking stark isolation of the Peruvian Andes. Marshall is where Eric Ebner '11 (BA) has his roots, raised by an attorney mother who worked for the county representing abused and neglected children, and a physician father who took each of the Ebner boys on a mission trip for his 16th birthday. Eric's was to Peru, which seems to have captured his heart. "It was kind of a coming-of-age trip in our family," he remembers. "It influenced me to love the culture."

That mission trip left such an impression that he went on to major in Spanish at USD, with a minor in visual arts. Last spring, he quit his job at a medical device company and teamed up with his brother, Aaron, who co-founded the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development and has been living in Peru since 2009.

They raised \$10,000 through a Kickstarter campaign and produced a stunning documentary film about a legendary potato farmer, a tiny indigenous enclave nestled high on a mountainside amid the clouds, and a precious way of life that could soon be lost. Via sweeping vistas of the snow-capped Andes and visuals so rich you can almost feel the texture of soil sliding through your fingers, *Opening the Earth* introduces us to Don Julio Hanco Mamani of Pampacorral, a weathered man with a mouthful of silver, revered in his community as the Potato King. “To be honest, I don’t even know if he knows how old he is,” Ebner says. “He can’t read or write. He can barely speak Spanish.” Julio and his neighbors speak Quechua, an ancient dialect used by the Incas for thousands of years. They live in adobe huts they built themselves, with no electricity. Don Julio’s water supply flows down the mountain and into his house through a makeshift piping system. His wife Rosa weaves the colorful traditional clothing his family wears, and they subsist mainly on a diet of potatoes, chicken, lamb and guinea pigs. Their way of life is ancient and the mountain climate is punishing.

“It’s just very harsh in every sense of the word. The wind is strong, the rain is strong, it’s really cold or it’s really hot. They get frost every night and when the sun comes out it burns your skin. But they know nothing else and it doesn’t seem to bother them,” Ebner says. “They wake up with the sunrise, they go to bed with the sunset. They capture the heat in their mud brick homes. It’s all just incredibly bare-bones. But they’re able to sustain their lives given what’s around them, and they don’t want for anything.”

Julio didn’t set out to become a world-renowned potato farmer, but his almost magical knack for evaluating soil and developing successful new species at various altitudes made him famous among mountain communities. Over time, he sextupled the 60 varieties of potato that his father had left him to more than 360. Word of his agricultural aptitude reached Moises Quispe Quispe, who had also grown up in the mountains, but had gone on to earn a PhD and head a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and developing indigenous farming communities in the Andes.

“You can have endless degrees, but if you don’t know the land, you don’t know its environment,” he says in the film.

With Quispe Quispe’s help and encouragement, Julio began traveling to city markets and entering his eye-catching produce in local contests. He always placed first.

“I developed much motivation to make something out of this ambition,” he says. Meanwhile, most of his six children left the mountains, the farm and the traditional way of life, more interested in earning money and finding material success than in safeguarding their legacy. Only one son — Hernan — sought to perpetuate it; not by farming, but by making potato chips. For three years, he scraped by in a two-room apartment in Peru’s capital city, Lima, sleeping on one side of the wall and slicing and frying potatoes on the other. Hernan’s lucky break arrived

when Quispe Quispe invited Julio to participate in a slow food festival in Italy. He wasn't allowed to import raw potatoes, so he brought his son's richly colored thick-cut chips instead. They sold out in two hours, and Julio took home 2,000 euros. That's when he began to truly appreciate the monetary value of his produce, Quispe Quispe says. And Hernan's potato chip business took off.

"Our community of Pampacorral is very proud of my son. He is an entrepreneur," Julio says with obvious satisfaction. "He has shown there is a market for farmers beyond just selling at local markets. The trade can be modernized."

Finding a modern outlet for an ancient way of life might well be the key to sustaining it. But why we should worry about sustaining someone else's tradition is a profound question that Ebner's film, with its soaring beauty and evocative imagery, endeavors to at least try to answer. For one thing, he argues, Julio's varieties could potentially save the planet from another catastrophic potato famine.

"He grows more varieties of potatoes than the U.S., China and the U.K. combined. He is essentially crossbreeding species that most people have never seen in their lives," Ebner says. "The top five varieties of potatoes in the U.S. account for 73 percent of all our products. Pests and plagues can easily affect that. Essentially, he's providing a security blanket by diversifying our bets against ourselves and against Mother Nature."

In truth, there's an idea that's even bigger here, something that surprised both Ebner brothers as they got to know Peru's indigenous farming communities more intimately. It has to do with our society's narrow definitions of poverty and happiness, and whether a genuine desire to help may actually be misguided.

"We want to look at poverty differently," Eric says. "What if it wasn't defined by a dollar a day or two dollars a day, but by how sustainable someone is? Maybe instead of trying to help these people with our own philosophy and our own way of thinking, we could learn from them. Maybe in fact they are filthy rich and we are thinking about it wrong."

The film makes that point quite effectively, says Kevin Guerrieri, associate professor of Latin American literature and Eric's former teacher. "Instead of viewing this community as poor simply because they don't have financial or economic resources, it discards that approach and looks at the group's strengths and the resilience," he says. "Rather than seeking to link these communities with others that have financial resources and looking for a technical fix, it's really about listening, learning, and trying to understand other peoples and other knowledge systems." Guerrieri admits that he's always excited to see former students go out and do projects of this nature, particularly when they collaborate in a respectful and mutually beneficial way. "As teachers, we never know how much impact one class may or may not have on a particular student's future, but it's always great to see what our students do when they go out in the world." Listening to others and learning from them was what Eric seemed to do naturally as a student, says Andy Cross, a lecturer in the Visual Arts department who taught Ebner photography and new media and has kept in touch with him since. He remembers Eric as an old soul, sincere and genuinely interested in what his classmates had to say.

“He’s always wanted to have some sort of influence or shed light on difficulty,” Cross says. “He doesn’t force change on people; I think this medium of film is a way of getting people to absorb ideas visually without being dogmatic.”

And if that’s what his work actually achieves, then Ebner will have fulfilled at least two of his early goals as an undergraduate at USD. “I knew I wanted to be fluent in Spanish,” he says. “And at one point, when I was studying abroad in Buenos Aires, I realized that the only thing that really mattered in the long term was being able to create something of value, help others, and express myself at the same time.”

Today, Julio Hancco Mamani’s gorgeous potatoes are sought after by some of Peru’s most celebrated chefs. Virgilio Martinez Veliz, co-owner of the internationally renowned Central Restaurante in Lima, uses them in his cutting-edge menu, which features and promotes indigenous Peruvian ingredients. A meal at Central costs hundreds of dollars and reservations are taken months in advance. But despite his growing fame and success, Julio’s life in the Andes remains simple. You can almost smell the fresh earth and feel the rough skin as the camera catches him gripping handfuls of freshly picked potatoes, showing off their widely varying shapes, hues and shades.

“I want to work, but I’m getting old,” he says. I just don’t have the same strength I used to. If anyone can continue this work, I would love to help them.” Rosa, also featured in the film, adds wistfully, “No one wants to work the land. The youth say that if you work the land, you can’t buy a car or a house.”

The Ebner brothers are hoping their movie persuades at least some viewers that cars and houses are not what make us happy, and that cash is not what makes us rich.

“As I was in Peru, I really began to look at these people as role models,” Eric says. “They have everything they could ever want or need right at their fingertips. Friends, family and purpose. If we adopted more of their values and mindset, we would be a more well-rounded and happy culture ourselves.” It’s a message he believes will resonate with anyone who sees the film. And if it inspires audiences to make even small changes in their own lives, he’ll be pleased.

At USD, Eric’s former professors will be looking on with a mixture of pride and optimism. “I’m not surprised,” Andy Cross says. “I see him as very dedicated. I believe he’s going to keep pushing and looking for bigger platforms for the voices he’s trying to showcase.”

After spending months in the mountains, immersed in Julio Hancco Mamani’s family, community and existence, Eric Ebner is most eager to hear what the star of the film thinks of the finished product.

“He doesn’t necessarily trust outsiders. Especially foreigners because he’s been burned in the past,” he says. “But he really allowed us into his life. I think he’ll be very proud.” — *Karen Gross*