

An aerial photograph of a vast agricultural field, likely in the Soviet Union, showing a large satellite dish antenna positioned in the center. The field is divided into numerous rectangular plots, and a long, straight line of small white structures or markers runs through one of the plots. The overall color palette is a monochromatic brown and tan, suggesting a dry or harvested landscape.

THE SOVIET GARDEN

**A DOCUMENTARY BY
DRAGOS TUREA**

THE SOVIET GARDEN

funded by
Republic of Moldova National Film Center
and
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In association with
ZENITH MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS
TVR - Romanian Television Society

76 minutes
Feature Film
Delivery format: DCP

World Sales: Syndicado



Syndicado
FILM SALES



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A filmmaker from Moldova tries to discover the truth about the Soviet experiments in atomic gardening.



Synopsis

While investigating his grandmother's mysterious death, Dragos, a filmmaker from the small, former Soviet country of Moldova, discovers a secret scientific experiment. Dragos unveils the secret plan of Nikita Khrushchev to transform Moldova into the Soviet Garden through the application of atomic energy in local agriculture.

Director's Statement

I was born in a small country called Moldova, formerly a part of the USSR. I spent most of my childhood with my grandmother Olympiada. One winter, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, my grandmother told me about secret experiments in agriculture back in the 60's. Years after this confession she died of cancer. Mysteriously, more and more people from her village, had the same illness and also succumbed to cancer. That's how my curiosity was awakened and I started the investigation. I wanted to know why people from Moldova, were dying of cancer more often than in the past? Was there a connection with those secret experiments?

My first interviews led me to the food industry, that had undergone major modifications after World War Two, all in the name of progress.



I started to dig deeper and discovered a famous Moldovan geneticist who worked during the Soviet Union and was still alive. In the early 50's he developed a mutant bean. He succeeded to change the colour of the black Mexican bean into white using radioactive isotopes. The second unique interview was from a scientist who created green cotton for the army and made sunflower oil taste like olive oil. All these results were obtained using radioactive machines and radioactive mutagenic substances. They told me that many of their colleagues died young, during the experiments.



Slowly the research brought me to a reality that was hard to accept. By the mid 60's the mobile and stationary radioactive machines were located across the entire country. Irradiation had reached such proportions that practically there were no crops that had not been irradiated prior to planting. Thousands of hectares of agricultural crops were processed with radiation. Most of the fruits and vegetables were irradiated before they reached the store shelves. Even the flowers were irradiated to create mutants to please the Soviet regime. The initial aim was to increase the agricultural productivity by using nuclear power. I realized that the Communist Party led by Nikita Khrushchev wanted to increase crops growth, to overtake the USA. That's how Moldova was chosen to become "The Soviet Garden".

After more research I found information about the mysterious Gamma Ray Field built in Moldova, in the 70's. It was used to irradiate different crops in open air.



I went to see how the place looks now. I was eager to see the field that was meant to stimulate plants to grow 30% more. I took with me two radiation measuring devices. There I found a desolate, abandoned experimental field with only a shepherd with his cows. I detected obvious traces of contaminated soil all around the place. I also realised that the radioactive equipment was missing from the center.

After dozens of rejections and years of writing letters I finally got the approval to film inside the most dangerous and secret place in Moldova, the radioactive waste facility. I found there all the Gamma Ray Units used in atomic gardening. Most of them were left in the open field for several years after Soviet Union collapsed. The Director of the facility told me that radioactive isotopes must be kept safe for 60,000 years and now it's a tremendous burden for the authorities of a poor country such as Moldova. In that shooting day me and my team were exposed to an enormous dose of radiation.

A lot of questions remain to be answered. Did Soviet Communist Party succeeded to play God after all? Did they really influenced the growth of crops and manipulate the environment using radiation? What was the price that people of Moldova paid for being part of "The Soviet Garden"?

The answers were obvious. In a period of just 70 years. Agricultural productivity has decreased dramatically, 75% of local biodiversity has been destroyed, the land is still contaminated and most of the people involved in the experiments have died young.

The last place that I investigated was the Genetic Institute or, rather, what was left of it. I was shocked at what I discovered there. Two young scientists were still using gamma ray treatment on chickpeas and soybeans, using a 60 year old radioactive unit.

In the memory of my grandmother Olympiada



DRAGOS TUREA | DIRECTOR / PRODUCER | PARMIS STUDIO MOLDOVA

Parmis Film Studio was established in 2009 by Dragos Turea, and is one of the first independent film companies in Moldova, which specializes in making documentaries about human stories, culture, history and other social issues.

Dragos Turea was born in Chisinau, Moldova in 1980. Studies Audiovisual Communication at the Academy of Theatre and Film, Bucharest. In 2006 Master's Degree in Film, at the Chisinau Academy of Music, Theatre and Arts. He made his debut in cinema with his short documentary "Vasile Mamaliga", awarded with the debut prize of The Union of Filmmakers from Moldova in 2007. From 2007 till 2015 he works as a Producer for Publika TV, Prime TV, Jurnal TV. In 2010 he started his biggest project to date, the feature-length documentary film production "The Soviet Garden".



MARIAN CRISAN | CO-PRODUCER | ROVA FILM ROMANIA

Rova Film is an independent film production company based in Bucharest, Romania, started by film director Marian Crisan in 2005. Some of its most important works include **"FAMILY PORTRAIT"** (2006), directed by Marian Crisan which was awarded with Best Short Film, UCIN (Uniunea Cineastilor din Romania) 2007, **"THE AMATEUR"** (2007) short film which won Best Screenplay at the 17th Dakino International Short Film Festival, Bucharest, 2007 and Best Short at the Festival de Cinema Independent de Barcelona 2008, **"ORIZONT"** (2015) feature film, directed by Marian Crisan which premiered at the 19th Tallin Black Nights IFF, in competition and was awarded with the Best Music at UCIN 2017 for the composer Cristian Lolea. **"THE SOVIET GARDEN"** (2019), feature length documentary directed by Dragos Turea is the latest co-production.



Crew

Directed by Dragos Turea

Written by Dragos Turea, Marian Crisan

Director of Photography Ion Bors

Edited by Vadim Severin

Original Music by Cristian Lolea

Sound Operators Marin Turea, Victor Ciobanu, Grigore Bechet

Sound Design Alexandru Dumitru, Dragos Catarau

Produced by Parmis Film Studio

Co-produced by Rova Film

World Sales - Sindicato

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