

Letter to the Editor 1.12

Back to the Future

Three decades ago the US government was looking to locate a nuclear waste repository on Italy Hill. Residents formed Citizens Against Nuclear Waste to oppose it.

As with hydrofracking today, we gathered evidence and learned the technology was unsafe to people and nature. Some citizens thought we were naïve or radical.

Our actions kept the dump from here, but the nuclear waste problem remains unsolved.

Since then, we've seen three major developments in Yates County:

1. Yates now has 35 wineries, all but one started since 1980. They're a major economic benefit in terms of jobs, tourism, multiplier effect (restaurants, rooms, etc.) and sales and property taxes.
2. Agriculture has grown with the influx of Mennonite farmers and rise of organic methods. Mennonites have greatly improved farmland's beauty and productivity and started other businesses. And thanks largely to the efforts of Klaus and Mary-Howell Martens, Yates has the most organic farming acreage and crops diversity in the state.
3. Lakeshore vacation properties shifted to year-round homes and now constitute a large portion of the tax base.

All these positive developments are at risk if hydrofracking is allowed. Let's dissect some pro-fracking arguments.

1. **I can do what I want with my own land.** *Not if it adversely affects others.* With compulsory integration ("60/40 rule"), if 60% of the land around you is leased, the gas company can drill under your property *without your permission*—like saying, "I'm going to log your trees and pay you the lowest price." *Compulsory integration is unethical, undemocratic and un-American.*
2. **I need the money to stay in business.** If drilling starts, you won't be able to live there with the noise, dust, bad air from thousands of truck trips and industrialization of your property. If you do finally receive some royalties, your farm will probably no longer be farmable. The fracking process is 1,000 times more destructive of land, air and water than conventional drilling. It might also ruin the life of your neighbor, who's getting little or no royalties. You'll be left with worthless wasteland, and can be held responsible for *his* property value losses.ⁱ
3. **The DEC will ensure it's done safely.** The DEC has *18 employees left in the entire state* to monitor *all* extraction processes. They can't even enforce existing laws. Gas companies plan to frack thousands of new wells a year, up to 60,000. Wherever they frack now, thousands of accidents and spills are reported—many more go unreported.ⁱⁱ

4. **Drilling my land helps American energy independence.** The domestic price of this gas is at an all-time low.ⁱⁱⁱ Industry plans to export most of the frack-gas to other countries, where prices are higher. It's all about short-term profits, not energy independence.
5. **This is just a political fight between business and environmentalists.** The industry has tons of money and lobbyists. From Jan. 2007 to Oct. 2011 it spent \$1.34 million on campaign contributions *just in New York*. Almost 75% went to legislature, governor, and local candidates and PACs.^{iv} According to a Maplight report,^v Rep. Tom O'Mara (R) received \$13,700 and Rep. Tom Reed (R) \$32,250 from the industry. And "the Cuomo-Duffy (D) campaign was by far the largest gubernatorial recipient of natural gas industry money, receiving \$153,816.06"^{vi} Industry spends millions more on propaganda telling us "natural" gas is clean—yet the fracking process is as environmentally bad as coal!

Fracking isn't about political parties. It's about community—*our* community. Oil and gas companies get billions in tax incentives and subsidies. Several not only *don't pay income taxes*, but even *get tax credits* each year.

The annual societal, health and environmental costs of petroleum use are estimated from \$500 billion to more than \$1 trillion dollars. Taxpayers are stuck shouldering these costs. We're letting extraction companies steal our natural resources and then paying them for the privilege of being robbed!

We moved to our family farm 39 years ago. We've been in the wine industry 30 years. Hydrofracking is the greatest threat to our way of life and family health since the proposed nuclear waste site.

Art and Joyce Hunt

Hunt Country Vineyards

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Editors: Please insert footnotes if there is room. If no room in print, please provide in online version.
Thank you.

ⁱ ("Rush for Gas Rights Ignites Battles for Control of Land", www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/us/towns-fighting-to-stand-ground-against-gas-drillers.html?emc=eta1 ; "Hydrofracking Sure to Contaminate Water", www.watertowndailytimes.com ; "Rush to Drill for Gas Creates Mortgage Conflicts", www.nytimes.com/2011/10/20/us/rush-to-drill-for-gas-creates-mortgage-conflicts.html?;

“Regulation Lax as Gas Wells’ Tainted Water Hits Rivers”,
www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/us27gas.html?hp)

ii (<http://un-naturalgas.org/weblog/2011/07/leaked-draft-nysdot-document-the-potential-impacts-are-ominous/> ; “Hydrofracking decisions in New York State Will Not be Based on Science”,
www.examiner.com/environmental-news-in-rochester/hydrofracking-decisions-new-york-state-will-not-be-based-on-science ; “Safety First, Fracking Second”,
www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=safety-first-fracking-second)

iii (See “Forbes” 1.3.12 “China Set to Frack America in Shale Deal with Devon”; and, “The Great Natural Gas Export Swindle”, www.pressaction.com/news/weblog/full_article/gasexport07032011/)

iv “Deep Drilling, Deep Pockets, Expenditures of the Natural Gas Industry in NY to Influence Public Policy , Part 3, Jan. 2012, www.commoncause.org/ny).

v “How Much Would ‘Huge Political Consequences’ From the Oil & Gas Industry Cost?”,
<http://maplight.org/content/72909>.

vi <http://www.northcountrygazette.org/2012/01/10frackingfinances/>.

See also, “The Fractured Ethics of Fracking”, <http://mcgowanfundblog.blogspot.com/2011/05/fractured-ethics-of-fracking-by-larry.html>)