

# After years of 'fracking,' Pennsylvanians remain mixed about gas drilling

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Despite having an eight-year head start on Marcellus Shale natural gas extraction, Pennsylvania residents are just as uncertain about the effects of horizontal hydraulic drilling as New Yorkers, researchers at Cornell and Penn State have found.

And although they are generally more pessimistic about the potential positives of "hydrofracking," New Yorkers are still more likely to support exploration of the Marcellus Shale than oppose it.

Richard Stedman, associate professor of natural resources at Cornell, presented the findings as one of three experts at a panel of the Agribusiness Economic Outlook Conference, held Dec. 13 at the Statler Hotel on campus.

"Uncertainty does not seem to go away over time, although Pennsylvania residents were more willing to accept it, given equal recognition of the impacts," Stedman said.

He said an overwhelming majority of [respondents](#) to a survey of 6,000 households in the two states admitted to knowing nothing or very little about what to expect in terms of key economic and environmental effects of [natural gas](#) extraction.

Their trust of the key players involved in the gas drilling debate was also very low, although Pennsylvania residents were slightly more willing to trust gas companies than their New York counterparts, who considered

scientists, cooperative extension specialists and environmental groups more trustworthy.

Nearly 40 percent of New Yorkers surveyed said they supported gas drilling, 30 percent said they were opposed to it, and 30 percent were neutral. In Pennsylvania, 47 percent indicated their support and almost 18 percent their opposition, with 34 percent neutral.

Tim Kelsey, professor of [agricultural economics](#) at Penn State, said uncertainty pervades everything having to do with gas drilling in his state, including scientific and [economic analysis](#) by experts, as there is not much reliable data.

"A lot of the discussion is based on anecdotes because this activity is relatively new," he said. "We don't yet have good secondary data on much of the impacts and implications." "

His own survey of 1,000 residents who lived within 1,000 feet of [gas drilling](#) wells in Pennsylvania's Bradford and Tioga counties found that more than 52 percent reported a positive personal impact, 17 percent reported a negative impact, almost 4 percent said there were both positives and negatives, and almost 28 percent said they were unsure.

He said rural landowners, who hold the majority of the leases, tend to be more positive.

"You don't see that level of perceived benefit among rank-and-file community members," he added.

Kelsey said he's found it difficult to gauge effects on municipalities and agriculture.

Emergency services have had to respond to increased call loads, and

roads in rural areas with poor infrastructure have taken a beating, but residents report the gas companies have been very responsive in repairing damage.

"I have yet to talk to a municipality that has said its taxpayers are bearing the burden," he said.

Most of the state's farmland is located away from the [Marcellus Shale](#). But farms located near wells have reported some challenges, including access to their fields, transportation, competition for labor and public perceptions, as some people question the quality or safety of food produced on drilling sites, Kelsey said.

David Kay, a senior extension associate in Cornell's Department of Development Sociology, said uncertainty about the pace, scale and geography of drilling sites is one of the biggest challenges when reviewing the economic impacts of [natural gas extraction](#).

"I would exercise caution in believing those hyping the economic benefit, but also those condemning it because of environmental impacts. It is all determined by how many wells are being drilled," Kay said.

Provided by Cornell University

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