

Experts Debate Effects of Fracking on New York State Economy, Environment



November 16, 2012

By [Carolyn Krupski](#)

At a debate over hydraulic fracturing on Thursday night at Cornell, six experts from various disciplines debated the practice's implications for the environment and the economy in New York State and the U.S.

The speakers drew on their personal experiences with the controversial practice, which involves injecting chemicals and water into the ground at high velocity to extract natural gas.

John Holko, president of Lenape Resources, an oil and gas company that has drilled in New York State for 30 years, opened the debate by arguing in support fracking for what he called its economic and energy benefits.

We need to "move forward," Halko said. "You can't prevent the process, just mitigate issues."

However, Walter Hang, founder of Toxic Targeting Services, a watchdog group for environmental violations, argued that brine, a liquid containing toxic metals produced in fracking wells, could potentially contaminate drinking water and have a negative impact on the environment.

Asked to address the potential economic effects that the fracking industry could have on New York State, Hang said that the economic success experienced by communities where fracking occurs would not be sustainable in the long-term.

No matter how you look at it, Hang said, “fracking hurts New York State.”

Dr. Bill Podulka, co-director of the Marcellus Accountability Project and a New York landowner, echoed Hang’s sentiments.

“Fracking is capital intensive, so not many jobs are created” by the process, Podulka said.

Podulka also raised several other negative economic impacts fracking could pose for New York State — especially in the agriculture sector.

Citing fracking’s effect in Pennsylvania, he forecasted overall price increases for New York’s agricultural commodities, including milk, one of the state’s most important food products. He said increased ozone emissions from fracking could hurt agricultural production, particularly for soy and grapes.

However, Nancy Schmitt, an energy investment specialist, said that the U.S. could become the world’s largest oil producer by 2030 and could achieve energy prices four times lower than the world average if it expands its fracking operations.

In response, Prof. Robert Howarth, ecology and environmental biology, said that Schmitt’s data, provided by a report from the International Energy Agency, is misleading.

“The IEA report said that fracking is disastrous, if you read the whole report,” Howarth said.

The speakers then turned their discussion to the effects of fracking on climate change.

Howarth said the only way to combat climate change is to reduce methane emissions.

“Climate change gives us reason to expect more intense storms like Sandy,” Howarth said. “Shale gas aggravates methane emissions.”