

We're Not Your Mule - Why Rural Communities Are Pushing Back Against Renewable Energy Hype

It's easy for renewable energy developers to dismiss opposition from rural communities as "NIMBY" (Not In My Backyard) complaints. Is this really about not wanting shiny solar panels or towering turbines nearby, or is it about generations of rural communities pushing back after decades of political and corporate overreach and broken promises?

Let's start with some history. Remember DuPont's Teflon scandal? It was such a mess that Hollywood made a movie about it—*Dark Waters*. Then there's Bayer's Roundup debacle, which left lawsuits and health scares in its wake (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/01/roundup-weedkiller-cancer-lawsuit-settlement-bayer>). And don't forget Agent Orange, a toxic legacy from Vietnam that left a trail of devastation both abroad and at home (<https://www.npr.org/2019/11/01/774707780/agent-orange-stories-from-the-vietnam-war>). These aren't isolated incidents—they're examples of rural America paying the price for big promises and bad outcomes.

Now, wrap all that history in the slick sales pitches of renewable energy developers. Land agents arrive in town with contracts in hand, claiming their projects will save the planet, lower taxes, and fund schools. Add a dash of guilt-tripping about property rights and the environment, and it's no wonder folks in rural communities are skeptical. But this guilt-tripping comes with another cost: it creates a divisive and combative atmosphere within the community. Neighbors who question the benefits of these developments are painted as selfish or short-sighted, while those who agree with the developers are cast as sellouts. The result? Fractured communities that once worked together now find themselves at odds, battling over promises that too often fall short of reality.

After all, how much have we already sacrificed for the greater good? Transmission lines, gas lines, communication lines... all crisscrossing our fields, while fracking wells pop up like weeds, and now renewable energy facilities eyeing our land—it's a lot to swallow. When is enough, ENOUGH?



The False Narrative of the NIMBY

Developers love to claim that rural folks fear change or don't understand "the science." It's a common refrain: "We just need to do a better job explaining the science so people understand." But let's set the record straight: we're not anti-science or stuck in the past. We've just been around long enough to recognize when we're being sold a bill of goods. It's not fear of change; it's experience talking.

This patronizing attitude assumes rural communities lack the intelligence or capacity to grasp complex issues. Yet, we're the ones managing farms, operating heavy equipment, and running businesses—work that requires plenty of know-how and critical thinking. What developers often fail to recognize is that it's not the science we misunderstand—it's their motives we don't trust.

Another common tactic developers use is **whataboutism**—deflecting valid concerns by pointing out unrelated or equally problematic issues elsewhere. For example, when faced with reports that solar modules are manufactured using forced or slave labor, such as that of Muslim minorities in China (<https://www.congress.gov/event/118th-congress/house-event/LC73227/text>), or that child labor is used to mine cobalt for renewable energy batteries (<https://www.cecc.gov/events/hearings/from-cobalt-to-cars-how-china-exploits-child-and-forced-labor-in-the-congo>), developers often shrug

it off. They'll argue, "What about the fact that these same regions produce our clothes, cell phones, and shoes?" It's a diversion tactic designed to downplay legitimate ethical concerns while deflecting blame onto broader global issues.

This kind of whataboutism does nothing to address the real worries of rural communities, such as the long-term environmental and economic impacts these developments could bring. Instead, it attempts to sidestep accountability by painting these concerns as hypocritical or irrelevant. But here's the thing: just because problems exist elsewhere doesn't mean we shouldn't hold developers accountable for their choices and actions right here, in our backyards. I'm sure we all would agree that a human right's violation is a human right's violation and we wish not to be complicit in furthering it.

The "holier than thou" mindset of some developers doesn't help. They talk down to us, mischaracterize our concerns, and insist they know what's best. It's like they're saying, "Trust us, we're saving the planet," while quietly lobbying to strip away local control and use eminent domain to force their projects through. If that doesn't scream arrogance, I don't know what does.

Speaking of arrogance, why is the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) even weighing in on eminent domain for renewable energy projects? The answer becomes clear with a closer look: they've signed a lucrative three-year deal with the renewable energy industry, ensuring financial rewards for their involvement. In other words, this union was bought off. You can read more about this agreement here: <https://www.ibew.org/media-center/Articles/23Daily/2312/RenewableEnergyProject>. This arrangement raises serious questions about whether their comments are truly objective or simply paid advocacy.

Erosion of Trust

The truth is, trust in institutions—government, corporations, and even the media—has eroded over decades, and for good reason. Rural Americans have seen promises turn to dust too many times. Renewable energy developers face valid concerns backed by scholarly studies and scientific evidence. But this erosion of trust isn't isolated to energy—it's deeply embedded in the broader societal landscape, as highlighted by the 2024 presidential election.

The election brought this erosion of trust into sharp focus. Debates over election integrity, misinformation, and the role of powerful corporate and political interests have deepened the divide between urban and rural communities. Many Americans, particularly those in rural areas, feel that their voices are ignored or dismissed by a

system that seems increasingly controlled by elites. This sense of disenfranchisement is mirrored in the renewable energy debate, where developers often sideline community concerns while pushing their projects forward.

Adding to this skepticism is the financial structure of renewable energy projects. Developers stand to gain enormously, as upwards of one-half of their facility's costs are covered by taxpayers like you and me, through government subsidies and incentives. The remainder is often funded by investors, who also reap significant financial benefits. Meanwhile, it is rural communities—our lives, our landscapes, and our livelihoods—that bear the direct impacts of these developments. Shouldn't their motives be questioned? Developers position themselves as saviors of the planet, but when they stand to profit so handsomely while asking communities to shoulder the burden, their intentions deserve scrutiny.

This erosion of trust has real consequences. It fuels opposition to projects that might otherwise be welcomed if approached with transparency and respect. Just as rural voters question whether their interests are truly represented in national politics, they also question whether renewable energy developers genuinely care about local well-being—or if they're simply chasing profits under the guise of environmental stewardship.

When developers ask us to trust them, we need to remember this isn't just about business. It's about our homes, our families, our heritage, our legacy, and our futures—not theirs. This is why communities must push back, assert their rights, and demand accountability—not just in elections but in every arena where their livelihoods and values are at stake.

What's the Real Agenda?

Developers claim their projects will save the planet, but they don't mention the enormous taxpayer subsidies—sometimes 50% or more—that keep these facilities afloat. They also downplay the negative effects on rural communities, focusing instead on the supposed benefits.

- Renewables rely heavily on taxpayer-funded subsidies: <https://www.energy.gov/.../federal-solar-tax-credits...>

Rural communities aren't NIMBYs—we're just tired of being treated like pawns in someone else's game of three-dimensional chess. Honestly, it feels more like being the mule hitched to someone else's plow—breaking your back in the hot sun while someone else collects the harvest. Developers are reaping profits while expecting us

to carry the burden, and all the while they assure us, “It’s for the greater good” and enjoy making claims of being a “good neighbor”.

We’re raising valid concerns and fighting for our property rights, our health, our legacy, to preserve our heritage... let alone fighting for our future. These aren’t just buzzwords to us; they’re the cornerstones of rural life and the values we work every day to protect. And while developers may dismiss us as uneducated or unreasonable, we’ll keep asking the tough questions and demanding real answers.

And if you think rural men are formidable when protecting their farms, you’ve clearly never met a rural woman fighting to protect her family. The saying “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” doesn’t even come close to describing the unstoppable force of a rural mother or grandmother safeguarding her heritage, her legacy, or worse yet... her family and the generations to come. Developers should take note—this isn’t a battle they can win with slick marketing campaigns and empty promises. Because at the end of the day, it’s not about what’s in our backyard—it’s about protecting the farm, home, land, and legacy we’ve worked so hard to build.