

DELAWARE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE VOTES TO OPPOSE PIPELINE

...a PennEast meeting summary by Jared Flesher

The latest PennEast pipeline meeting was held on September 29 in rural Delaware Township, inside the gym of the Delaware Township School. I counted more than 325 residents on the gym floor and in the bleachers, but people kept streaming in after I counted. *The Hunterdon County Democrat* estimated the crowd at 400.

Based on early maps, it appears Delaware Township stands to lose more preserved farmland to the pipeline than any other New Jersey township. Several residents asked PennEast whether they had specifically targeted preserved farmland for the pipeline route. For the record, PennEast's response is "No, we did not look for preserved farmland."

PennEast's spokeswoman assured residents that if you are using your land for farming, there will be "very little impact to your land after we are done."

I myself have been wondering what impact a large natural gas pipeline might have on preserved farmland, so I began looking into it prior to the meeting. Though much research remains to be done, these are a few things I've found:

--In an August 2014 article headlined "Lancaster County Farmer Says Crop Yields Never the Same After Gas Pipelines," a farmer claims that 24 years after a pipeline was run through his farm, his corn is still stunted along the pipeline right-of-way. You can read that article here:

http://lancasteronline.com/news/local/lancaster-county-farmer-says-crop-yields-never-the-same-after/article_7ba7f6b0-2246-11e4-bba8-001a4bcf6878.html

--In a March 2014 article in *Lancaster Farmer*, an official for the Williams pipeline company states that "Fields usually take three years after the digging to return to their pre-pipeline yields." You can read that article here:

<http://www.lancasterfarming.com/0503-Pipeline#.VCrZOvldV8E>

I will ask PennEast if they can point me to peer-reviewed research published in a scientific journal that establishes the impact or non-impact of natural gas pipelines on crop yields. If I were a farmer in the path of the pipeline, I'd certainly want to see the data.

--Then there is the question of whether pipeline construction introduces heavy metal contaminants onto farms. According to a February 2014 article published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* titled, "Assessment of Ecological and Human Health Risks of Heavy Metal Contamination in Agriculture Soils Disturbed by Pipeline Construction," there aren't many answers yet to this question. The article states: "Few studies have documented the soil degradation and heavy metal contamination caused by pipeline construction."

The same study, which looks at natural gas and oil pipeline construction in China, found that

pipeline construction resulted in elevated levels of cadmium, copper, nickel and other heavy metals in nearby soil. You can read that study here:

<http://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/11/3/2504/pdf>

I will ask PennEast if a similar study has been completed in the United States to assess the potential for heavy metal contamination in places where pipelines are built.

At the end of the meeting, the Delaware Township Committee passed a resolution to actively oppose construction of the PennEast pipeline, becoming the first New Jersey township to take an official stand.