

# IS THIS THE FUTURE

**F**OR two years, Tammy Manning and her family have been the faces of the anti-fracking movement in America. From the sleepy backwater of Franklin Forks, just ten miles from the New York county line in rural Pennsylvania, blonde and photogenic Tammy and her children have been feted by television companies and environmentalists alike: portrayed as the 'perfect' example of how one family's lives have been blighted by a greedy energy company whose

By **Daniel Bates**  
and **Olga Craig**

hunger for profit had put their health at serious risk.

Pop stars, actors and politicians, from Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon and Susan Sarandon to Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Arun, scurried to the tiny town, jostling to be photographed with the Mannings and likening the scores of fracking

sites dotted across Franklin Forks' lush fields and valleys to the 'rape of mother Earth'.

This tiny town then, was to become America's litmus testing ground for the future of its 15-year love affair with fracking. And the Mannings case would be one of the decisive factors in the debate about whether fracking is safe.

Living just 130 yards from one of the well sites in one direction and 200 yards from another, the family's water, supplied from a well, turned a toxic, sludge-grey shortly after local energy company WPX

began drilling for shale gas in December 2011. To Tammy's horror, she was told that the water contained arsenic. Even more alarming was the discovery that methane was gushing out of her kitchen tap. Tammy, 45, was told to stop using her propane-fuelled cooker immediately or risk an explosion. One cigarette butt thrown from a car window could set the house ablaze. So high were the methane levels, the entire Manning family risked being suffocated.

It was, the town's anti-fracking lobby believed, a coup. This was the perfect family to use to drum up support for its campaign. Tammy did scores of media interviews and embarked on an inter-county tour of rallies to high-light the serious threat fracking posed.

Franklin Forks – sitting on a shale layer stretching from New York to Alabama with 84,198 billion cubic feet of gas stored inside it – would be the front line of the fight to fend off fracking. But a bombshell was about to drop. After a 16-month investigation by the Department of Environmental Protection, a 125-page report concluded that the company's drilling was not, in fact, responsible for the methane contamination of the Mannings' well. It was, in fact, a naturally occurring shallow gas and completely different from that at the hydraulic fracturing wells.

By then, however, the Mannings' home county of Susquehanna had become a battleground. As locals took opposing anti and pro-fracking stances, neighbours whose families had been friends for generations quarrelled and began eyeing each other with suspicion. The internet was awash with propaganda from both sides.

Those who backed the controversial procedure were accused of doing so in the hope of profiteering from the boom fracking brought. Those who denounced it were decried as scaremongers and cranks stirring up wild predictions of mass explosions and epidemics.

Mothers blamed their babies' illnesses on fracking. Environmentalists warned it caused earth tremors, would scar swathes of the countryside and predicted plumes of fire escaping from water taps.

Before long, the local population was whipped into a frenzy. There were street scuffles and allegations of intimidation. Businesses which backed the gas company were cold-shouldered and saw trade tumble. Almost overnight, acrimony and recriminations replaced hometown pride.

For Franklin Forks, a hitherto friendly hamlet with an idyllic laid-back pace of life, the painful, drawn-out squabble has been a potent lesson in how a harmonious community can become bitterly divided by the issue.

Within the next five years, this kind of ugly conflict is one that could come to a community near you. For in Britain, too, fracking – blasting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals under very high pressure against dense shale rock, opening up fissures that allow the natural gas trapped within the rock to escape – is now dividing communities in areas where the process might be a possibility.

Undeterred by the official vindication of fracking, Tammy Manning has a very clear message for those areas

REUTERS / DAN CALLISTER



**ANTI-FRACKER:**  
Sean Lennon at  
the drilling rig in  
Franklin Forks

in Britain where shale rock has been identified: 'Pray to God they don't find gas,' she says simply. 'Your community will never be the same.'

Battle lines have been drawn already. In Balcombe in West Sussex, where the Environment Agency has granted permission for an exploratory well, there have been chanting protesters, confrontations with police and 30 arrests. Some eight out of ten villagers oppose the drilling.

But, just as in Susquehanna county, the community is quickly being riven by recriminations and accusations. Last week, one Balcombe farmer, furious that the protesters were holding up drilling firm Cuadrilla's operations, sprayed slurry perilously close to the protest camps. Some businesses in the town say the gas company's interest in the area can only increase prosperity and reduce unemployment.

Back in Franklin Forks, the townsfolk know how damaging the battle can become. Their experiences come as a stark warning to this country.

Life for the Mannings became increasingly tedious once the initial tests indicated dangerous levels of methane, arsenic and barium. They could no longer cook or drink the water in their £60,000 home, and once a week Tammy's husband Matt, 43, had to drive 20 miles across the New York state border to fill gallon jugs of water at his mother's house. 'Things rapidly became a nightmare,' says Tammy. 'We had to use an electric hob

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# OF FRACKING?

**A town divided. Celebrity protesters. Wild health scares. Sound familiar? But this is Franklin, USA – birthplace of fracking. And after 15 years of bitter battling about poisoned water, they've finally accepted... drilling is NOT the problem**



**CELEBRITY SUPPORT:** Yoko Ono with anti-fracking resident Ray Kemble. Top: Susan Sarandon with the Manning family. Above: Tammy Manning heads off to refill water battles with granddaughter Madison

and heaters which cost £200 a month. We had to keep the bathroom window open, even though it got to minus 26C in winter.

'It was very scary. We worried that our three grandchildren, who lived with us, would end up with asthma or other illnesses for life. Our granddaughter Madison, who is seven, threw up every morning from when the problems started until our well was blocked in March.'

But it was when the Mannings began protesting and became the high-profile face of the anti-fracking brigade that their problems really began – with harassment from fracking supporters.

'As soon as I went out of the driveway en route to work at 5.30 in the morning, they would be there, tail-

gating right behind me,' said Matt. 'It was pure intimidation.'

Vera Scoggins, 62, a retired estate agent turned green activist, took up the Mannings' cause. The silver-haired, acid-tongued mother of three was convinced no one could trust the reassurances that fracking was not a health threat. 'Believing that would be swallowing the government line,' she says.

Furious that the town's business folk backed fracking, she began taking a video camera into their premises to ask them why, filming their responses and posting them on YouTube. Such was her enthusiasm that Lisa Payne, 52, the owner of the Heavenly Angels sandwich shop in the town, sought a court order banning her from the store. Lisa, who

caters for the gas employees hired to drill in Franklin Forks, says she was harassed constantly by Vera.

Lisa says: 'The campaigners would bus in big groups of activists from New York and Canada to picket the store or just stand across the road and stare.' Next came anonymous phone calls and insults on Facebook. Before long it was affecting her business. Where once her takings were around £1,000 a day, they halved. But Mrs Payne continued to support the frackers. 'The gas company has been really good,' she insists. 'They are good people. Britain should give fracking a chance.'

In a bid to win more support, the gas industry bought the Northeast Driller, a local newspaper, and used it to strengthen its claim that there

was nothing to fear from fracking. It paid for a website called Energy In Depth which promoted pro-fracking stories. In retaliation, the campaigners responded with a rival site entitled Energy In Denial.

By now the townsfolk were at each others' throats. One resident, Ray Kemble, claimed that he had a dead goose thrown on his driveway as a warning he was a 'dead duck'.

Both sides turned to social media sites to trash the other; local council meetings became fractious and embittered. Meanwhile, the riches flowed. A Penn State University study estimated that landowners in Susquehanna County received £50 million a year in leasing income. And according to Jeff Tyler from the chamber of commerce in nearby

Montrose, the boost fracking brought to the economy was 'unbelievable'. Rental accommodation is full, restaurants are full and two new hotels are being built. Royalty payments, says Mr Tyler, can be as high as the £300,000 a month being earned by one landowner who has eight wells on his 600 acres.

The Mannings, however, remain unconvinced that fracking is safe, despite the Department of Environmental Protection's report.

'The methane is not occurring naturally. Not at the level we had it,' Matt maintains. 'They tore the ground open and now we have all this gas. It wasn't there at such levels before the fracking. Now it is. Explain that?'

And the campaigners are not giving in either. Iris Marie Bloom, who founded Shale Gas Outrage, insists she still opposes fracking even if it has been proved it did not cause the Mannings' problems.

'It isn't just the fracking,' she points out. 'It's the pollution, the trucks, the compressor stations, the pipes,' she says.

'Once drilling companies get a toehold, they will find ways to influence regulators and elected officials so people feel powerless.'

Her advice to Britons is: 'Don't let them in at all to begin with because they never frack a little, they frack intensively. You have the most power before they start drilling.'

## Violence fear as hardliners head for peaceful Balcombe protest camp

**BALCOMBE** is braced for violent protests as thousands of activists head for the tiny village at the centre of the fracking furore.

A hardline protest group has warned they will arrive in West Sussex with several thousand campaigners intent on stopping test drilling. Supporters of the No Dash For Gas group have said they will resort to civil

disobedience and direct action against energy giants Cuadrilla.

They plan to set up a six-day camp near the drilling site on Friday, joining the 60 activists already protesting in Balcombe.

The deployment of 100 police officers controlling the existing protest will be boosted to cope.

More than 150 villagers attended a meeting in Balcombe on Friday

night when No Dash For Gas campaigners told them their community would not be overrun.

Mother of two Sarah Hirst, who has lived in Balcombe for six years, said: 'No one in the village condones law-breaking and violence. At the same time, we are very grateful for the support of the activists coming down here.'

No Dash For Gas spokeswoman

Ewa Jasiewicz predicted at least 500 and probably several thousand activists would turn out. 'Our intention is to stop Cuadrilla drilling. That is what local people want,' she said.

Superintendent Lawrence Hobbs of Sussex Police warned last night: 'If protesters become violent, they should understand they will be arrested.'