

ENVIRONMENT

Report: Rural America Produces Greenhouse Gasses on Behalf of Urban and Suburban Areas

While disproportionate numbers of rural residents, especially low-income and communities of color, are exposed to unhealthy greenhouse emissions, a majority of goods produced in the process are headed to cities and suburbs.

by **Claire Carlson**
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Annual Emissions by Rurality

■ Rural ■ Non-rural

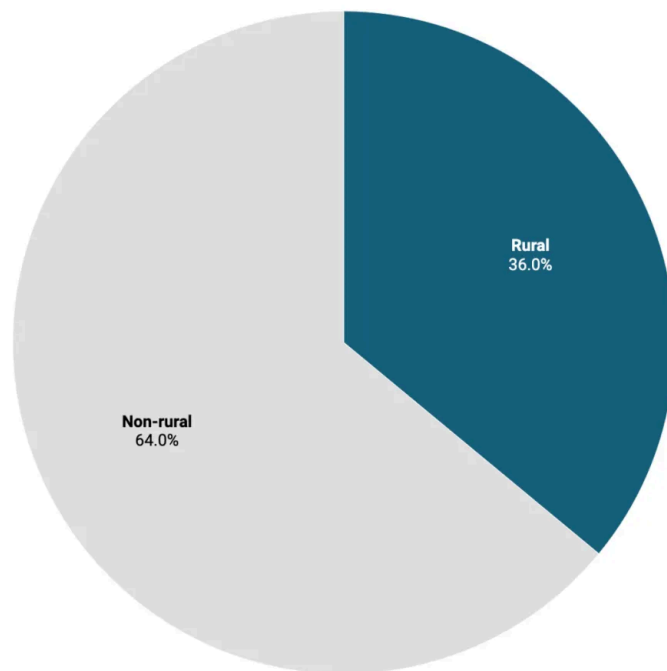


Chart: Rural Climate Partnership • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The Rural Emissions Analysis by the Rural Climate Partnership found that at least 36% of annual US emissions (2,263 million tons of CO2 equivalent) are produced in rural America.

A new **report** shows that at least 36% of annual greenhouse gas emissions in the United States come from rural America, but they're mostly used to produce energy and food for urban and suburban America.

And while rural communities – particularly low-income and rural communities of color – are exposed to a disproportionate amount of greenhouse gas emissions, they're not receiving the federal investments to decrease these emissions.

“If we really want to meaningfully reduce emissions, [we need to invest] in efforts that are rural to reduce the emissions that are connected to that consumption,” said Maria Doerr, lead author of the **report** and program officer for the Rural Climate Partnership, in an interview with the Daily Yonder. “Rural America is the source of these emissions, but they are not the ones driving the demand that creates these emissions.”

Rural emissions make up +36% of US emissions

According to the Rural Climate Partnership analysis, at least 36% of US-produced emissions are generated in rural America. The chart below shows rural and non-rural emissions per economic sector in million metric tons of annual CO2 equivalent (MMT CO2e) emissions.

	Rural	Non-rural	
Electric Power	737	838	1,575
Agriculture	569	63	633
Industry	478	961	1,439
Transportation	365	1,466	1,831
Residential & Commercial	113	727	840

Chart: Rural Climate Partnership • Source: [EPA GHG Inventory](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The report was produced by the **Rural Climate Partnership**, a project of the nonprofit rural advocacy group the **Heartland Fund**. Using data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), they found that energy production and agriculture are the leading sources of greenhouse gas emissions in rural America. Industry like natural gas, petroleum, and cement manufacturing was the third leading source, and transportation and residential energy uses were the fourth and fifth, respectively.

Doerr said that the emissions produced by power plants are a particularly potent source of greenhouse gas emissions, and nearly half of those emissions are produced by rural power plants. “That energy is being shipped out to the cities and suburbs,” Doerr said.

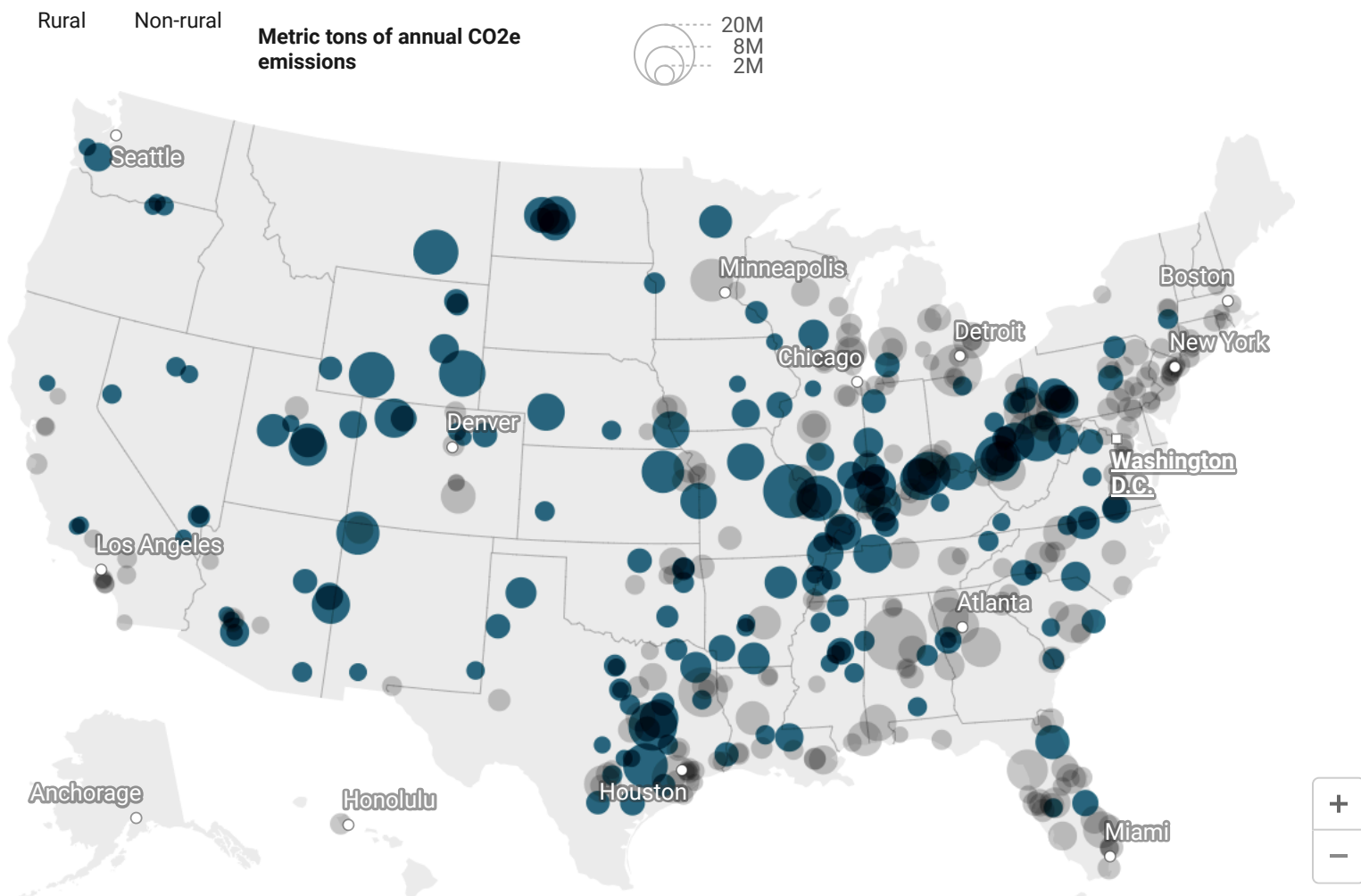
While the rest of America benefits from this power, rural communities are exposed to the toxic air pollutants from this power's production. And these effects aren't felt equally.

Approximately 37% of rural residents within a three-mile radius of rural combustion plants are low-income, and 29% of residents within that radius are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, according to the report. Long-term exposure to these pollutants can lead to respiratory and cardiovascular problems, immune system damage, and cancer, according to the [EPA](#).

The federal government has passed legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change, but very little has been earmarked for rural America.

Rural America produces carbon-intensive energy

At least 47% of the emissions from carbon-intensive energy production are generated in rural America. Below, power plants with +1 million metric tons of annual carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions are mapped by their ruralness, as defined by the HRSA.



Of the combined total appropriations from three major climate laws – the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS & Science Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – only 2.3% of the funding is earmarked exclusively for rural communities, according to an [analysis](#) from the Brookings Institute. About 20% of the funding is rural-stipulated.

Rural America should be prioritized for this funding because it's at the center of some of the most carbon-intensive industries, according to the Rural Climate Partnership.

“In the vast expanse of rural and small-town America, there is a story that has been largely untold, one of significant emissions reduction potential shadowed by systematic underinvestment,” wrote Doerr in the report.

Doerr said they hope this report encourages legislators to rethink rural America's role in climate solutions.

“I hope that this report can help start some powerful conversations about...how we support, uplift, and invest in rural America and rural-based climate solutions,” Doerr said.



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Oh comeone! Heartland?

You could not get data from some organization not so strongly and obviously and for so long a denier of anthropogenic global warming? or how renewables would bankrupt the country? Oh yes, they've changed, now they acknowledge warming, just it's not so bad - the dinosaurs had it warmer 200 million years. ago; we'll be able to grow tomatoes at the North Pole.

We are in a transition of changing energy from burning fossil fuels to renewables. Surprise, but that does not happen overnight. Yes, there are coal plants in rural areas still in operation since the 1970's that were causing acid rain in New England and Atlantic states. Now coal is not competitive with solar and wind anymore and everyone is leaving coal behind as an energy source. And yes, most people live in cities and urban areas so yet, farm produce goes mostly to urban areas.

Is there something here that no one knew before?

The problem is the unbelief in global warming in rural areas and that global warming is being caused by people burning billions of tons of fossil fuels and injecting 37+ billion metric tons of CO2 into the atmosphere each year upping the average global temperature 1.5° to 2° C. That sort of rapid warming is not without effect to glaciers, weather, sea levels, changing of local climates, etc.

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