



Transforming the Rural Narrative on Climate Solutions

Leveraging a benefits-forward strategy to connect with hardworking rural people

Our goal: To reach across cultural differences and avoid culture war frames to connect on shared values.

The Reality of our Landscape:

A growing concern about extreme weather does not equate to motivation for climate action.

Many polls show that less than 50% of rural folks believe climate change is primarily human-caused.

Even fewer rural residents think their actions can have a meaningful impact on changing the trajectory of global warming.



Starting with Understanding Our Audience:

The more that we can personalize our messaging to a specific audience's unique values, the more we can evoke deeper emotions that translate into action.

- For us to get where we need to go, **we need to talk to people who haven't bought in on climate already.** This frame is for them.
- We're working on local and regional narratives for reaching rural people.

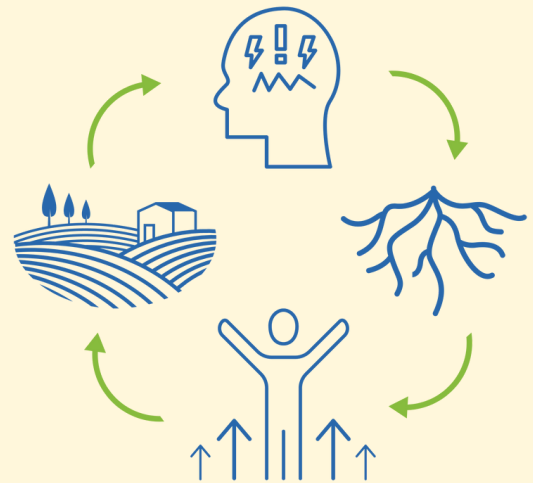
For more information on applying this narrative framework or for future training opportunities, contact narrative@ruralclimate.org.

Rural people are united by shared values that are salient across geographies:

Research from Emily Diamond at the University of Rhode Island about environmental policies* shows us that rural communities have values and priorities that differ from people living in more urban areas, but that a *shared rural worldview contributes to a sense of social identification with other people living in rural communities across the country*. These values include:

1. Connectedness to nature
2. Disconnectedness/resentment
3. Rootedness
4. Self-Reliance
5. **Hard work**

Rural communities are supportive of environmental protection policies, particularly if messages about such policies are crafted in language consistent with rural identities and values – and center their personal agency.



**Understanding Rural Identities and Environmental Policy Attitudes in America. Emily Diamond, University of Rhode Island. 2021*

If we meet on these shared values and follow a messaging order of operations, we can craft narratives that pivot to policy action.



Elements of a Strong Narrative Program:

Elevating credible, local messengers to change and amplify our local story.

Creating compelling content and storytelling that meets people where they're at, on shared values.

Amplifying our narratives with robust distribution so people hear our stories with **frequency**.

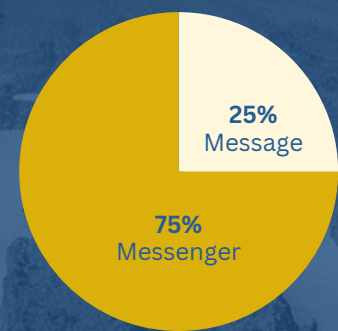
We're shifting local and regional narratives by employing a place-based, rural-led, economic forward strategy.

Show economic benefits from climate solutions.

Tell with trusted local messengers.

Build narrative change over time — with repetition and storytelling.

Narrative shifting, or changing the stories that we tell and that we hear, is 75% messenger, and 25% message.



The 5 Keys of a Transformative Narrative for Hardworking Rural Americans:

The following two pages will demonstrate the application of a narrative designed for rural message-makers and storytellers. **As you look through the examples, remember:**

- **It's not about climate.** It's about working people, their pocketbooks, and their families.
- **Lead with values and people** — not with villains, government, and climate catastrophe.

Our job through this messaging work is to find ways to resonate with people on the shared value of hard work and demonstrate climate solutions as good for our rural economies.

1. Center and lead with working people as heroes.

Frame policies in ways that show how they will impact and empower working people. Make working people and their concerns the subject and focus of messaging.



2. Support and value the importance of work

Acknowledge and appreciate hard working people, and what they should expect in return.

Essential workers show up throughout crisis and keep our economy strong. It's time that our hard work result in livable wages.

3. Situate working people as engines of the economy

When people have what they need, it is inherently an economic good.

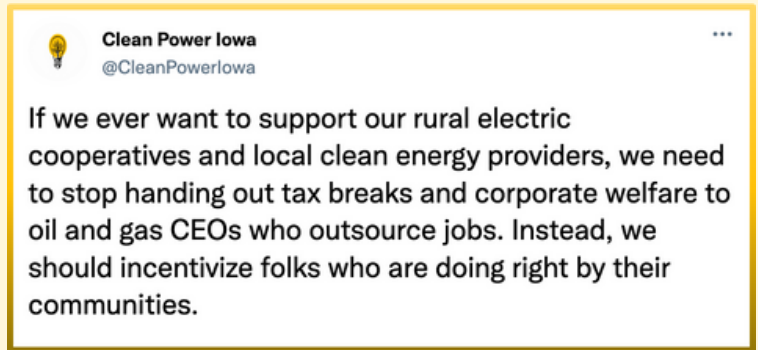
As a small farmer, I wish that more people understood that healthy farmers means a stronger economy for all of us.



4. Position Government and Corporations in a Supporting Role

People want a hand up, not a hand-out.

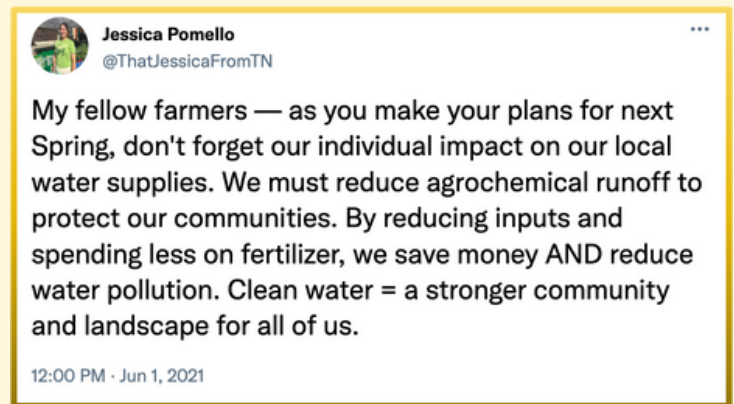
It's not about doing something *for* people, it's about *equipping* people.



5. Relate the economy to communities and families

Relate your message to the broader economic impact and community:

- Use “makes economic sense” and “is good for everyone.”
- Targeted universalism: What’s good for us is good for all.



Narrative Dos	Narrative Don'ts
Center working people	Lead with villains or center government as a fix all
Benefits forward-framing	Climate alarmism
Focus on opportunities and tools	Make people feel they're offered a handout
Respect	Preach