

County. Exec Parisi: Dane County and farmers partner on new innovation to clean lakes, confront climate change

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Contact: Stephanie Miller

[608-267-8823](tel:608-267-8823)

Today, Dane County Executive Parisi and local farmers announced a new initiative that will help farmers reduce manure runoff into the lakes, improve farm productivity and decrease climate change emissions. As part of his 2018 budget, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi is allocating \$200,000 to study the potential of creating a large-scale community facility where farmers could bring manure and have it composted. The finished product will be less prone to runoff and could be trucked to areas more in need of the nutrients found in manure.

“People have composted grass clippings, leaves, and yard waste for years and now the science tells us composting manure creates a product that reduces runoff and carbon emissions while shrinking manure piles by 50 percent,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. “Our farmers are our best partners in our community’s lake clean-up efforts. Working with them to set up this time-honored practice on a bigger scale in the Mendota watershed is another innovative, effective approach at substantially decreasing algae growth in our lakes.”

While parts of our county are rich with phosphorus, other parts of our region are not. The composting process makes manure easier to truck and move, reducing overhead costs and making it more economically feasible to relocate phosphorus to

places that need it. Composting manure reduces the volume in half and carbon emissions by 75 percent.

Yahara Pride Farms has been working with University of Wisconsin agronomists to explore the benefits of composting manure. Yahara Pride Farms is a farmer-led, nonprofit organization and was the first to bring this beneficial compost technology for manure to area farmers. The composting operation could potentially be set up at the location of the county's former yard waste composting site outside of Waunakee.

"Farmers are helping lead the way toward our water quality goals in the Yahara Watershed," said Jeff Endres, Chairman of Yahara Pride Farms. "Using composting technology to managing how nutrient-rich manure is applied to farm fields is a key component to achieving these goals."

The naturally occurring process of composting creates a byproduct that is easier to apply with a form of phosphorus more readily available for plants to consume, reducing the risk it remains in the soil and vulnerable to runoff. Composting manure also reduces carbon emissions by binding carbon to the soil, preventing it from being given off as a greenhouse gas. This practice is commonly utilized throughout the world and offers a new tool here for the work underway to improve both our air and water.

The study included in the County Executive's budget would explore how many farmers could participate in a regional composting facility, who would operate and maintain such a facility, and potential markets for the compost that is produced. It is believed such a facility would help farms of all sizes by reducing the amount of liquid manure spread on fields and by having access to composted manure that stays on the land better and has fewer pathogens.

"Agriculture supports our economy, families, communities, quality of life and is the best means of sustaining balanced land use in the fastest growing county in the state," Parisi said. "As one of the top 25 agricultural producing counties in the entire country, our multi-generational family farms and the thousands of jobs they create and support are here to stay. Working with them to promote composting is our next opportunity to facilitate the kind of collaboration that has brought the progress and successes we've seen to date in our ongoing work to clean our lakes."

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Stephanie Wilson Miller

Communications Director

Dane County

[608.267.8823](tel:608.267.8823) o

[920.470.4618](tel:920.470.4618) c

[Facebook](#) @DaneCoJoe