

Dane County Exec Parisi: Announces plans to develop innovative community manure processing plant as part of 2023 budget

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 27, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Today, County Executive Joe Parisi joined clean lakes advocates to announce Dane County's latest innovative initiative that will substantially reduce phosphorus runoff, advance the community's clean lakes efforts, and benefit the climate. Parisi's 2023 budget will include \$3 million to study the feasibility of opening a commercial grade, community scale manure processing plant and funding to acquire a site for this potential development.

"We have done a lot over the past decade to address the root cause of excessive algae growth in the Yahara Chain of Lakes. Yet, as our community has stepped up phosphorus reduction and containment efforts, climate change rains have become even more frequent," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "We need a grander scale solution to address this challenge if we want to reach our phosphorus runoff reduction goals. I believe Dane County can and should play a leading a role in this work. That's why my 2023 budget includes \$3 million to fund this study and find a site for potential development."

Manure spread onto frozen land can spur phosphorus delivery to area lakes, triggering algae blooms and green slime. Dane County remains one of the top counties for milk and commodity production in the United States. Protecting this legacy while embracing the kind of bold solution that is needed to help the lakes, which also serve as economic drivers, is a priority.

Ending winter spreading will help reduce the phosphorus load. Society has ways to

manage human waste at a community-wide scale. If the same principles are applied to animal waste, Dane County can substantively move the dial on cleaning area lakes in a way never previously conceived as possible.

There is precedence for this project. Dane County played an instrumental role as a partner to spur the development of two digesters in the North Mendota Watershed, now almost 15 years ago. Located just outside of Middleton and Waunakee, these facilities have helped farmers manage manure application. Both projects convert methane from collected manure into renewable natural gas (RNG) and truck it to Dane County's RNG Processing and Offloading Station for use as cleaner burning vehicle fuel.

Between the two digesters and this new manure processing plant, Dane County's goal is to process manure from two-thirds of animals in the Mendota watershed—meaning the facilities would treat approximately 400 million gallons of manure each year from about 40,000 cows. Approximately 50 percent of phosphorus loading in the Mendota watershed occurs during the January through March period.

Some of the mostly highly productive farmlands in Dane County exist within the headwaters and watersheds of its most sensitive rivers and lakes. Agriculture is an enormous part of Dane County's economy, and the community values its farms. This manure processing plant will provide yet another way to keep multi-generational family farms farming while dramatically reducing runoff of nutrients like phosphorus that in high quantities harm water quality.

Community manure treatment is a priority action identified in the 2022 "Renew the Blue: A Community Guide for Cleaner Lakes & Reach in the Yahara Watershed," which was developed through a coalition of the partners including the Clean Lakes Alliance, Dane County, Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin, Dane County Cities & Villages Association, Dane County Towns Association, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District and 12 other partners. This proposal by County Executive Parisi is the path to a future with fewer manure coated, snowy farm fields in high run off areas. Farmers will have an alternative to spreading and worrying about manure storage tanks.

With funding in this budget, Parisi is asking staff in Dane County's Department of Land and Water Resources to begin the work necessary to determine how much manure could be processed, along with the potential environmental and financial

benefits of converting it into renewable energy. Through this plant, Dane County and its partners can create a one-stop service for manure that can be transported to one central location. Incentives can be created for participation in a true community scale solution. This type of a project will also offer smaller producers an opportunity to better manage animal waste streams with technical solutions they may not otherwise be able to afford on their own.

A community manure treatment plant will be an asset to Dane County's clean lakes and climate goals, collecting methane from manure and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Renewable natural gas and excess nutrients that contribute to algae growth could be exported out of the watershed. The feasibility analysis Parisi is funding will look at options for manure transportation, handling, possible pipeline needs, and what components would be needed to process large volumes of waste in the smartest way possible.

A plant treating the manure of 30,000 cows would reduce methane emissions by the equivalent of more than 100,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide. This reduction is comparable to removing the emissions of nearly 255 million miles driven by passenger vehicles – or 10 million gallons of gasoline per year.

“Suck the Muck”

Parisi's 2023 budget will also include funding for the next phase of Dane County's highly successful “Suck the Muck” initiative. \$2 million is being allocated to initiate planning next summer for Door Creek. The work should begin in 2024 and remove tons of phosphorus laden sludge.

To date, Suck the Muck has removed 180,000 pounds of phosphorus and 56,000 tons of sludge from four miles of Dorn, Token, and Six-Mile Creeks that all flow toward Lake Mendota. Tests have shown this work has staying power. Dorn Creek alone has seen an 850 pound annual reduction in phosphorus delivery to the lake.