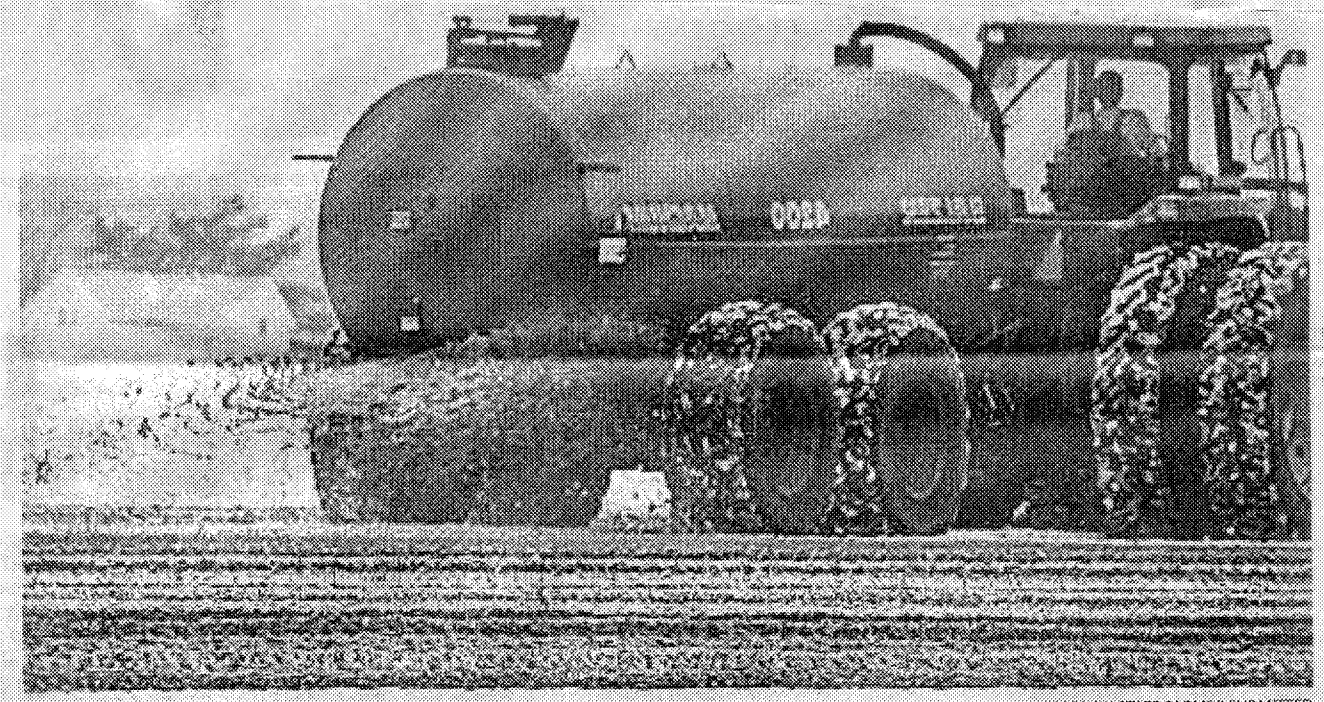
STATE LOOKS TO GIVE MANURE TREATMENT PROJECT A PUSH



WISCONSIN STATE FARMER SUBMITTED

A farmer applies manure to his fields. Manure pollution has become a growing issue as the number of large-scale farms has grown to more than 200. The state could spend up to $20 million for a private initiative to clean up manure and harness the waste as a source of natural gas.

PLAN COULD CUT POLLUTION, PRODUCE NATURAL GAS

LEE BERGQUIST | MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Faced with mounting criticism over pollution problems from cow manure, Gov. Scott Walker's administration is turning to a private initiative as a remedy to treat massive quantities of animal waste.

State officials could spend up to $20 million in subsidies for systems to clean up manure and harness the waste as a source of natural gas.

The initiative is chiefly targeting northeastern Wisconsin and the Lake Michigan basin, where concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, proliferate and the region's fractured bedrock can create conditions allowing manure to percolate through the soil and pollute groundwater. Runoff from manure also has been linked to algae blooms and tainted wells.

Manure pollution has become a growing political issue as the number of large-scale farms have grown from about 50 in 2000 to more than 200 today, according to state figures.

Last week, officials released documents that asked farms and companies for proposals for improved manure management that would, among other goals, keep pathogens from animal waste from being spread on farmland.

The scale of one or more systems could be unprecedented and the cost could approach $100 million in private investment, public documents suggest. The $20 million in subsidies would come from funds paid by utility customers for

See MANURE, Page 5A