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State Senator André Jacque
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Chairman Tauchen and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 511, relating to distribution of a fertilizer derived from converting manure into compost and compost byproducts.

Wisconsin agriculture is pursuing a number of best practices and initiatives when it comes to tackling manure storage and handling to reduce runoff. One of the more promising approaches for a dairy farm to reduce pressure for excessive spreading is to compost their manure. In talking to experts who work with farmers to address the financial and logistical hurdles, it became clear that Wisconsin farms looking to make this environmentally friendly change face an additional regulatory obstacle to gaining market access to sell the valuable organic compounds produced through the composting process that have been shown to create a profit center in other states.

Current law requires a fertilizer distributed in Wisconsin to be guaranteed to contain a combined weight of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium that is at least 24 percent of the total weight of the fertilizer unless DATCP promulgates a rule exempting the fertilizer or DATCP grants a permit authorizing the distribution of the fertilizer as a nonagricultural or special-use fertilizer.

These requirements currently make organic products of composting unsaleable in Wisconsin. Assembly Bill 511 makes a number of reasonable changes to these requirements that apply to fertilizers and soil or plant additives that are derived from converting manure into compost and compost byproducts, thereby removing a barrier to the economic viability of manure composting in Wisconsin that is not present in other states.

Marketing manure can be a beneficial, low-risk way for livestock producers to manage animal waste on their farms while incorporating a value-added product into their overall business plan. The opportunity to sell a waste product and recoup an economic benefit while reducing potential environmental liability is a much sought-after outcome this legislation will help to create.

Assembly Bill 511 is supported by the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association and the Dairy Business Association.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 511.