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FARMERS NEED TO CHECK OUT FUNDING FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY VENTURES, SAYS DATCP SECRETARY

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MADISON -- What Wisconsin lacks in oil wells and coal mines may one day be compensated for in livestock and crops, if a current state initiative to encourage the development and use of renewable energy pays off.

The Focus on Energy Renewable Energy Program offers incentives ranging from low-interest loans for installing renewable energy equipment in homes and businesses to grants for research and development of new technology. Jim Harsdorf, the state's Secretary of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, wants the agriculture community to be aware of the opportunities.

"Time is running out for those who want to participate in the first round of grant proposals and businesses, and individuals with a stake in agriculture need to be aware of these funding sources," said Harsdorf.

One source of renewable energy comes from organic material that can be converted into fuel. Farmers interested in demonstrating a cost-effective technology for converting manure into biogas and generating electricity, for example, may be eligible for a Renewable Energy Technology Research and Development Grant of up to \$50,000. The pre-proposal deadline is Aug. 1, 2002.

"Wisconsin farms can play an important role in helping to increase our state and nation's energy self-sufficiency," said Harsdorf. "And by doing so, our rural economy will prosper."

Other incentives available through the state's renewable energy program include technical feasibility study grants; business and marketing grants; cash-back rewards for installing renewable energy technologies; and an equipment grant for non-profit organizations.

"What's needed is imagination, technical know-how, and a willingness to take risks," said Larry Krom, Renewable Energy Program Manager. "Theoretically, Wisconsin farms can produce everything that can be produced from a barrel of oil."

Focus on Energy is a public-private partnership offering energy information and services to energy utility customers throughout Wisconsin. The goals of

this program are to encourage energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, enhance the environment, and ensure the future supply of energy for Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.focusonenergy.com or contact Krom at 608-588-7231.