

FARM

FROM A1

One watchdog group, Midwest Environmental Advocates, was unaware of the Matsche Farms project, but voiced concern about its magnitude.

"That type of expansion should be accompanied by a robust environmental review process," said Tressie Kamp, an attorney for the Madison-based group.

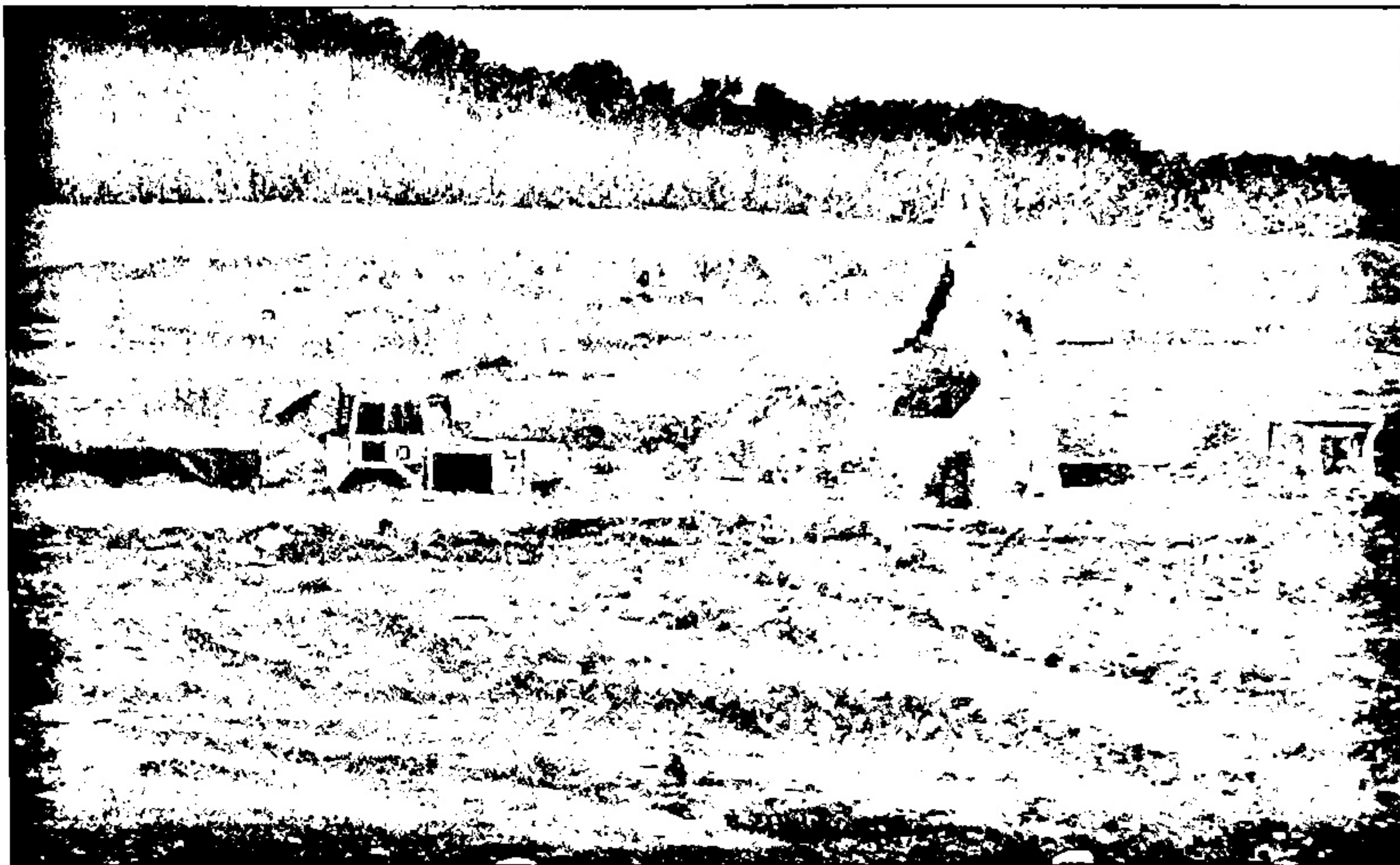
Farms with more than about 1,000 animals — also known as "concentrated animal feeding operations," or CAFOs — are permitted and regulated by the state Department of Natural Resources.

DNR officials said Matsche Farms has not yet sought approval for its expansion, and that the project could be considered simultaneously with a permit renewal process starting later this year. The farm's existing permit, issued in 2011, expires in June.

The state has permitted about 270 such CAFO operations statewide, including seven dairy farms in Shawano County.

The largest in the county now is Green Valley Dairy LLC, located on Hintz Road northwest of Pulaski. State records show that Green Valley Dairy has between 4,800 and 5,600 animals approximately.

The government's



LEADER PHOTO BY SCOTT WILLIAMS

Construction crews have started earth-moving work for a Matsche Farms Inc. expansion that includes two new barns, a new milking parlor and a manure pit capable of storing 25 million gallons.

formula for counting a herd is based on "animal units" rather than actual numbers of animals.

State records put the Matsche Farms herd at 3,270 animal units, or about one-third of its planned 9,280 units. DNR agricultural specialist Danielle Block said that a herd of that projected size would likely include about 9,000 actual cows, heifers and calves.

Shawano County Farm Bureau President Deb Mielke applauded the Matsche Farms expansion plan as an encouraging show of strength for agriculture.

"Wisconsin is the perfect place to do dairy," Mielke said. "More power to them."

Shawano County planners endorsed the farm expansion in May, determining that it would present no serious threat to public health. Nearby landowners were notified of the plan, and none of them raised objections.

In addition to facilities for on-site manure storage, Matsche Farms told the county that manure is spread on fields totaling 1,800 acres owned by Matsche Farms and another 2,000 acres rented for that purpose.

When county officials measured odor emanating from the farm, they found acceptable levels for all but two neighbors. Both of those neighbors signed forms indicating that they have no objection

to the Matsche Farms expansion.

One of those neighbors, Lea Tatro, said she anticipated that supporting the project would bring her a buyout offer from Matsche Farms. A subsequent offer of \$100,000 was far below what her property is worth, she said, calling it a "lowball" offer.

Tatro said she does not really support the expansion. She dislikes the smell and noise, and she fears that a bigger farm will hurt her property values, making it difficult to find another buyer.

Referring to Matsche Farms, she said: "I don't want to stop them, but I don't want to live next to that, either."