

# HOSPITALITY NEWS

*A trade publication serving New Hampshire's Food, Beverage, & Lodging industry*

## Cooking Oil: The Fuel of the Future?

BY RACHAEL BROWN

New England restaurateurs used to rely on local pig farmers to get rid of cooking grease. Farmers would call on restaurants, pick up their waste vegetable oil, then feed it to their pigs to fatten them up for market. Farmers were willing to pay one penny per gallon, or about \$5 a barrel, for used grease.

But those days are gone. Over the years, regulations regarding waste disposal became much more stringent. It is now common practice for restaurateurs to have their grease hauled away by out-of-state companies that charge as much as \$1 per gallon or \$50 a barrel. That leaves restaurants with an expensive bill as pouring grease down the drain is illegal.

Finally, there may be an alternative to this costly process—biodiesel, an emerging industry that could have a significant impact on the hospitality industry. Biodiesel could help to reduce NH's reliance on foreign oil while also increasing NH restaurants' profitability.

Chris Kozlowski of the Orchard Street Chop Shop in Dover says, "Most people are still paying for grease waste removal. Some are paying \$100 a month to have the stuff taken away."



Kozlowski hopes to be part of a 13-member commission established by HB1373 that will study ways to properly dispose of grease-trap waste. Other members will include representatives from the NH State Legislature, NH Lodging and Restaurant Association

*See Oil on page 11*

**OIL continued from page 1**

(NHLRA), NH Department of Environmental Services (NH DES), companies that handle waste and biodiesel researchers.

"It was only five years ago that people responded to biodiesel with 'bio-what?'" says Rebecca Ohler, an air quality engineer with the NH DES. "Now, more people have heard of biodiesel, and are thinking about using it. We are beginning to suspect that this year, there may be a drop in price and we will see the price get closer and closer to diesel fuel."

One reason for dropping prices is the Federal Tax Credit, which benefits small agri-biodiesel producers by giving them a 10-cent-per-gallon tax credit. Also, here in NH, the State Legislature addressed this alternative fuel when they passed HB1758, a bill establishing biodiesel as a renewal energy source.

Restaurant grease from the campus dining hall is just what the UNH Biodiesel Group is already using. "We're working with a NH company, MBP Bioenergy of North Conway. It is entering the market of selling small (70 gallon) biodiesel processors to universities and other businesses that produce a fair amount of waste vegetable oil," says Michael Briggs, a graduate student and UNH Biodiesel Group member. "We have a prototype at UNH's Woodman Farm, where it will be used to process campus dining hall waste oil into biodiesel for use in tractors on the farm, and for heating greenhouses."

Although much of the U.S.'s biodiesel is made from virgin soybean oil from the Midwest, Briggs says that biodiesel that comes from vegetable oil is chemically modified and can be used in pure form or blended with diesel.

"Many people don't realize that existing diesel vehicles can run on biodiesel, and that it can be used in home heating oil furnaces," he says. "We're using waste vegetable oil that's been processed into biodiesel.

It's important to realize that you can't just pour vegetable oil into your fuel tank; the viscosity is too high," says Briggs.

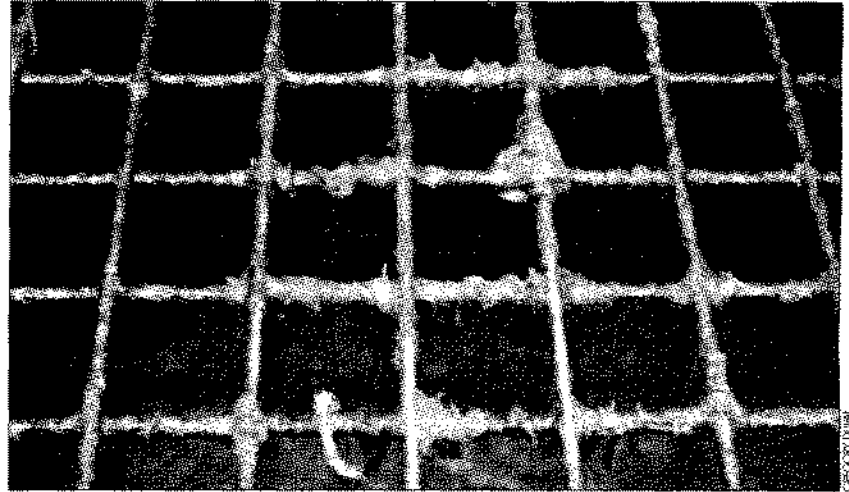
Currently, the City of Keene and Keene State College power their vehicles with biodiesel; the Air National Guard at Pease uses biodiesel; the City of Portsmouth has a recycling program that encourages residents to drop off their used cooking oil; and Cranmore Mountain Resort has been powering its snow grooming fleet with biodiesel.

Bean's Commercial Grease of Vassalboro, Maine, picks up grease from the City of Portsmouth while on its route picking up grease from NH and Maine restaurants. The grease is converted into biodiesel fuel for vehicles and home heating.

"We have saved the food industry in NH and Maine hundreds of thousands of dollars," says Randy Bean, co-owner of Bean's Commercial Grease. Bean says they are producing 1000 to 2000 gallons of biodiesel a day; their goal is to increase to 3000 gallons a day.

Al Landano, owner of MBP Bioenergy, picks up about 8000 gallons of waste grease per year from restaurants in the Mt. Washington Valley. "Two to three years ago, people were asking what is this biodiesel, but now it has turned 180 degrees. There is even a biodiesel magazine that was started one year ago," Landano says.

Landano's goal is twofold: to become a one-million-gallon plant, and to keep the business local. "With restaurant grease, you can recycle it to be produced



Used fryer grease is stored in vats.

and used locally, the goal is to keep it to a 250-mile radius," he says. "Once we are up and running, there will be no trouble finding the market. The day may come, when restaurants are approached by someone saying, 'I am in the biodiesel business and would like to pick up your waste.'"

Although many restaurants pay for the pickup of waste oil, some companies are migrating to a free pickup model, which will foster more environmentally friendly practices in the hospitality industry, not to mention significant cost savings for restaurants.

Bean takes it one step further and thinks that perhaps someday soon restaurants will actually get paid for their waste grease. "I honestly think that if the competition continues, we will see biodiesel companies willing to buy the waste grease that they remove from restaurants," he says.