

Recyclers compete for used restaurant grease

Fryer fat a hot commodity as alternative fuel source

By [Bob Berwyn](#)

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A pair of diesel vehicles that have been converted to burn the recycled vegetable oil set the backdrop for the group that is working together to make Summit Greasecycling happen. They are from left Mike Lakritz, JoAnn Kloiber, Dara Lor, Fez and Cindy Fairfield-Smith.

Summit Daily/Eric Drummond



The licence plate on Dara Lor's Blue Bird bus that has been converted to burn vegetable oil.

Summit Daily/Eric Drummond

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SUMMIT COUNTY — The spiraling cost of diesel is spurring competition for an unusual resource — used oil from Summit County restaurants.

At least one local entrepreneur is hoping to start a small local grassroots business by collecting the grease and turning it into fuel, while a larger Boulder-based company also is setting up contracts with local eateries to collect the oil and ship it to a biodiesel refinery near Denver.

Dara Lor said his purification facility on Airport Road in Breckenridge is up and running.

Lor, an energetic 26-year-old who races motorcycles and drives an old school bus powered by veggie oil, is partnering with Strategic Fence to convert that company's fleet of vehicles to run on the alternative fuel.

One of the trucks already has been converted, and Lor said he plans to convert the rest of the vehicles in the coming months, which could mean big savings on fuel costs for Strategic Fence. Lor said he can sell the purified oil at about half the cost of diesel fuel at local pumps.

Burning vegetable oil results in about half the emissions and 90 percent fewer particulates than using regular diesel fuel, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency figures.

After collecting the oil stored by restaurants in 55 gallon drums, Lor uses a centrifuge and a filtration system to clean out any food remnants and other impurities. Once that's done, the oil is ready to use as fuel, he said.

Lor made a point of contrasting straight vegetable oil, or SVO, with biodiesel, which is produced by a slightly different process.

“SVO makes the most sense,” for a small-scale, local operation Lor said. “You get the same benefits and take out the chemical part of the process.”

While biodiesel can be pumped straight into the existing fuel tank of a diesel-powered vehicle, using straight vegetable oil requires a separate fuel tank and a switching system, Lor said.

Converting a vehicle to run on veggie oil costs about \$3,000 for parts and labor. Along with a fuel tank, the entire fuel system and the oil has to be heated, which is done by using the engine's cooling system, Lor explained.

A community effort

Lor's partnership with Strategic Fence has enabled him to establish a filtration facility at the company's property on Airport Road in Breckenridge. Now it's a question of contracting with as many local restaurants as possible.

“We're hoping this will be a community effort,” Lor said, aiming to get local restaurants on board with the program as soon as possible.

It might not be a moment too soon.

Rocky Mountain Sustainable Enterprises has also approached local restaurants about collecting their used fat, said Bobby Starekow of the Summit County Restaurant Association.

“We're looking at putting together a 4.5 million gallon biodiesel facility,” said Adam Hall, marketing manager for the Boulder-based company. “We've signed on a number of restaurants in Summit and Eagle counties to work with us.”

Competition for used restaurant grease is growing across country. In San Francisco, the market has heated up to the point that recyclers are paying restaurants for the oil.

On the commodities market, so-called yellow oil is selling for about \$2.50 to \$2.75 per gallon, up about 400 percent in the past couple of years.

Wait and see

For now, local restaurant owners still pay to have their used grease removed by renderers — companies that recycle the oil for use in animal feed.

Starekow said that service has been somewhat unreliable. Having a local operation take the oil free of charge regularly would benefit local restaurants, he said.

“I'm pleased there's someone locally who is putting together a good recycling program,” Starekow said, referring to Lor and his partner Mike Lakritz. “They seem as close as anybody to having their ducks in a row. I'd love it if these guys got their program together.”

Lakritz is a silent partner in Lor's operation and is also working with restaurant owners who are interested in converting their used oil on-site for use as fuel.

“One of the things we're emphasizing is, we want to keep this local,” Lakritz said.

Keeping the operation local means the environmental benefits are also felt locally, Lor noted.

While he's had some interest from Starekow and other local restaurants, Lor said a “wait-and-see” attitude still prevails.

“Everybody is waiting to see if I can do it, if it's a no-brainer,” he said. “I've reached out to Copper, Keystone and Breckenridge. All the big guys are waiting to see me do something first. If we get local participation, I don't see how it can't work,” he said.

Lor estimates he could produce several thousand gallons of veggie oil fuel each month if he can get widespread participation from the restaurant community. He can be reached at summitgreasecycling@gmail.com with questions.

Bob Berwyn can be reached at (970) 331-5996, or at bberwyn@summitdaily.com.

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