

RMSE removes kitchen grease, makes it useful

By Barbara Hey

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BOULDER - Behind the kitchen door of any restaurant, there's grease - a vat of oil used to sizzle your doughnuts, French fries or tempura to perfection. At the end of the day that oil, cooled and filled with food crumbs, needs to be pitched.

It is illegal for large-volume restaurateurs to just throw cooking oil into the trash. It's an environmental hazard, so they pay to have it hauled away.

Until recently, the options for oil disposal were few. Many area venues hired a nationally owned company to pick up kitchen grease, which it would render along with other assorted animal byproducts into an array of products - fat for pet food, soap or solvents.

For the past two years, Front Range restaurants have had an alternative.

Restaurants are using recycOil - a clean, no-fuss recycling service provided by Rocky Mountain Sustainable Enterprises, or RMSE, a Boulder-based company committed to reuse the oil in an environmentally responsible way.

De Wayne and Aaron Perry (father and son) founded the business in the summer of 2005 after realizing there was business potential in taking a green approach to disposing and repurposing cooking oil.

"We recognized that the waste oil business represented a great entry point into the biofuels space specifically, and the regional sustainable development space in general," said Aaron, chief executive and managing director of the company.

Rocky Mountain Sustainable Enterprises processes barrels of "yellow grease" - cooking oil - from more than 1,400 restaurants from Castle Rock to Fort Collins, as well as from Colorado Springs and the Roaring Fork in partnership with Front Range Grease and All Valley Recycling, both local recycling services.

In addition, RMSE collects oil from Coors Field, Invesco Field at Mile High, Elitch Gardens and a number of hotels.

RMSE supplies restaurants with 55-gallon steel drums where the spent oil is deposited. When the allotted containers are full, the company picks them up and leaves clean barrels that have been degreased and washed at high temperatures. Customers are charged by volume. Large-volume restaurants might generate 50 gallons a month and pay \$15 for a pickup, Hall said.

Eco-Cycle in Boulder has a RMSE drum on site for residential users to drop off used cooking oil as part of its CHaRM program (Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials) at 5030 Old Pearl St. RMSE is working with the city of Broomfield to offer a drop-off site.

The oil is sent to a prefiltration plant in Berthoud where particulate matter is removed, and the oil is purified for reuse. The owners' initial goal - biodiesel - hit a snag recently when Rocky Mountain Biodiesel Industries, the company they had used to transform the oil into fuel, left the market. That left the company in a quandary according to Adam Hall, RMSE's marketing manager. "We had to figure out what to do with our oil," he said.

The solution was to sell it to local farmers for high-grade livestock feed.

"We definitely will be returning to biodiesel," Hall said. "We are working hard to make that happen." He said the company is looking into building their own integrated biodiesel plant at some point.

The founders' plan was for the company to be "a leader in sustainable business practices." That incorporates a commitment to the environment as well as to create jobs, and work to strengthen the local economy.

"We see the company as a stepping stone to develop a vertically integrated biofuels supply chain company; from feedstock to fuel production to distribution, as well as a way to work in agriculture, climate change mitigation and resource efficiency sectors," Perry said.

The company is working with local farmers to bring oil produced from their crops to restaurants and then recycling that oil back into agricultural use or for fuel. "We're looking to close that loop," Hall said.

Hall said RMSE's growing list of customers is the result of persistence and service. It has connected with clients through direct mail and cold calls.

"We make phone calls ... maybe six to 10 to catch people at the right moment. Restaurant people are very busy, and oil is not at the top of their list."

Once the connection is made, the company makes the oil pickup smooth. It tracks each client's volume and proactively schedules pickups according to patterns of use. That takes one item off restaurants' to-do lists.

"We eliminate the need for them to call us," Hall said.

Area customers include Foolish Craig's in Boulder and Wing Shack in Loveland.

For restaurant owners, the task of getting rid of used oil is a nasty one. If someone takes care of it with efficiency, they're grateful. Jack Evans, general manager of Outback Steakhouse in Longmont, has been a RMSE customer for a year.

"They do a good job. They're clean, and they are interested in my business," he said. He said the fact that the company puts the oil to good use makes it a "no-brainer."

Evans' previous oil service "sloshed it around, made a big mess," making the back of his establishment an eyesore. RMSE comes one or twice a month and leaves spotlessly clean barrels.

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Aaron and De Wayne Perry, founders
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Primary service: Disposing, repurposing cooking oil
Founded: 2005