Fuel made easy
Producing local biodiesel gains momentum

Jeff Moore
jmooore@theadvertiser.com

BATON ROUGE — A flask of yellow grease collected from campus cafeterias hardly looked like something drivers would want to put in their vehicles, much less a solution to the nation’s energy crisis.

But with the proper equipment, a few chemicals and a little time, LSU AgCenter environmental educator Bill Carney said, used vegetable oil could be used to run diesel engines for a fraction of the cost of petroleum.

“It’s a little cottage industry,” Carney said. “It’s going to take some work, some time and some putting it together. But the benefits are ... I’m spending $1 a gallon.”

Biodiesel projects are cropping up all over the area as farmers, entrepreneurs and truck drivers look for alternatives to high-priced petroleum diesel.

Biodiesel can mix at any amount with petrodiesel, works in today’s diesel engines with no changes needed, and has 3.5 units of energy for every one put into making it.

The problem has been its costly ingredient, up to this point mainly soybean oil in the U.S.

But biodiesel can also be made from canola oils and from waste stream sources, including used cooking oils or animal fats.

Do-it-yourself biodiesel

Dozens of people who wanted to learn how to make biodiesel in small batches attended a workshop at the LSU AgCenter’s W.A. Callegari Environmental Center in Baton Rouge on Wednesday.

The workshop trained participants on how to make biodiesel from used vegetable oil.

Biodiesel is made through a chemical process where glycerin is separated from vegetable oil.

Laboratory manager Javed Iqbal shows how to mix biodiesel during the LSU AgCenter seminar on the basics of making biodiesel Thursday at the W. A. Callegari Center in Baton Rouge. Biodiesel is made through a chemical process where glycerin is separated from vegetable oil.

The latest

The LSU AgCenter trained more than 100 people to make biodiesel at a workshop last week.

A New Iberia company recently received a $4 million loan to build a biodiesel plant at the Port of West St. Mary.

A Lafayette group is currently producing about 750 gallons of biodiesel a week at a warehouse in Carencro.

For the workshop, Carney combined 50 gallons of used vegetable oil with 20 gallons of...
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methanol to produce 50 gallons of biodiesel and 12 gallons of glycerin. Carney said for an investment of less than $1,000, people can make about 25 to 30 gallons of biodiesel at a time.

Steve Broussard of Lafayette said he attended the workshop to see if he could potentially make his own fuel for his diesel truck.

Halfway through the workshop, he believed it would be practical, especially if a few friends joined him on the venture.

“Do you want to pay $1 a gallon, or do you want to pay $4.70 a gallon?” Broussard said.

A growing industry

A local effort to produce biodiesel on a larger scale is also gaining momentum, as well as some help from the federal government.

Over the past two years, New Iberia attorney David Groner and partner Mike Valls have been developing Sustainable Fuels LLC, with a goal of building a biodiesel plant in South Louisiana.

Ken Boudreaux with his biodiesel mini plant. Enviro-Diesel produces about 750 gallons of biodiesel a week at its plant in Carencro, with plans to double its production within the next month.

“Think of it as the wave of the future,” said Metcalf. “We’re not producing a lot, but every little bit helps.”

Metcalf said he is currently collecting waste oil from about 60 restaurants, including Blue Dog Cafe, Hub City Diner, Casa Olé, Picanté, and about 20 local McDonalds.

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Metcalf said he is currently collecting waste oil from about 60 restaurants, including Blue Dog Cafe, Hub City Diner, Casa Olé, Picanté, and about 20 local McDonalds.

He said some restaurants charge him to collect the grease, but others have agreed to let him dispose of it for free. “It’s been overwhelming the support we’ve gotten from local restaurants,” Metcalf said.

Metcalf said he is currently selling the fuel to local farmers.

He and his partners, Chris Grenaux and Ken Boudreaux, are also using the fuel on their own vehicles.

“Actually, the trucks run more efficiently than they do on the fuel you’re buying at the pump,” he said. “It’s more fuel economy and less emissions. It’s a win-win situation.”

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