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INNOVATION

From the Fryer to the Gas Tank

In the kitchen of a Madison Culver's restaurant, dark vats of oil bubbled at 352 degrees, and the smell of french fries hung in the air.

It's the smell, it turns out, of fuel.

Politicians and environmentalists gathered at the Culver's restaurant at 2102 W. Beltline in May to give a grant toward what might become a bigger trend - running cars on the oil from restaurant fryers.

"I never dreamed that I'd be making Butter Burgers and fueling cars as well," joked Craig Culver, co-founder of the hamburger and frozen custard chain. "Who knows where it will go?"

The state Department of Administration is giving Madison Environmental Group a \$15,000 grant to help Culver's start a pilot program of running converted diesel cars on used, filtered soy bean oil.

"This is really a beginning and we hope it will lead to something larger," said department secretary Marc Marotta, noting that rising fuel costs can restrict economic growth.

So far, the number of Madison drivers using unaltered restaurant oil to fuel their cars is probably barely a dozen, said Rebecca Grossberg, a program manager for Madison Environmental.

Cars must also burn some regular diesel fuel in addition to the oil, so drivers need to add an extra fuel tank and fuel lines, Grossberg said.

Ryan Dewald said that conversion cost him about \$1,000 - meaning he needs to drive about 26,000 miles to recoup his investment

Bulrich said she was already considering joining other Culver's franchisees who have converted two cars to run on their own restaurants' oil.

-From staff reports