

## Ray Hudson's Cooking With His Big Mack

*If you want the skinny on saving money and the environment, talk to Ray Hudson.*

Two years ago, the Casey, Illinois, resident put his Mack CH tractor on a diet and came up with a second career, one that could save the nation barrels of oil and a slick way for drivers to keep more of their cash.

While listening to a Chicago radio station, Hudson heard about a local resident who converted his Mercedes® car to burn vegetable oil. To fuel the car, the owner would stop at Chinese restaurants and ask for enough oil to drive home. Hudson knew about alternative fuels: He hauls soybean oil and other products for ADM® through a company called McLeod in Decatur, Illinois. He liked the idea so much that, in 2003, he asked Greasel Conversions, Inc., the Missouri company that converted the Mercedes, to do the same with his 1999 CH.

The changes to the Mack were simple — there were no modifications to the engine — and cost about \$2,500. Hudson kept the two 135-gallon fuel tanks, added a 100-gallon tank on the passenger side and a 60-gallon tank on the driver's side, just behind the stock tanks. The 60-gallon tank holds diesel fuel, mainly to warm the engine on startup. One of the tanks holds heated water from the engine to make the thicker vegetable oil less viscous.

From its fuel tank, the veggie oil is filtered. Particles can cause maintenance problems, but Hudson said the oil can trim maintenance costs because it has a higher lubricity. At the time he converted, the Mack had clocked 610,000 miles. It topped 833,000 miles in April and is still going strong, with no warranty problems on parts.

That move has saved money and launched a new business for the career driver, who at age 65 has been driving for more than 30 years. "Diesel costs \$2.13 today and has been as high as \$2.39," he said from his mobile phone as he drove through the Midwest. "Veggie oil is costing us somewhere around \$1.50 a gallon, which includes cost of the collection and filtering of the oil."

To make the system work, Hudson needed fuel. His first stop was a Chinese restaurant in nearby Charleston, Illinois. They were interested in his plan, so Hudson left a 55-gallon barrel. Other restaurants followed. His favorite stop for fuel? Earl's Supper Club. As he told *Land Line* magazine, "They have the best catfish — and the best oil."



He also needed a plant. Hudson built a makeshift processing facility near his home — a 15x16-foot heated building where he lets the oil sit for a month ("It allows the flours and other stuff to settle out") before running it through a series of filters, ranging from 200 microns to 1 micron. For collections, he bought a diesel-powered pickup truck and mounted a tank in the back.

He estimates he spent about \$15,000 on the system but is saving enough money on the cost of diesel each week to slowly retire the debt.

Mileage with veggie oil is slightly less — about 5.5 mpg versus the 6 mpg Hudson gets with diesel fuel.

He does get the unmistakable smell of cooking food. People notice the scent. "A lot of them don't know what's going on," he said. "They think there's a restaurant nearby. If they happen to come sniffing, I say, 'It's just my truck.' Most want to know more about it and how to do it."

Which leads Hudson to his new mission: He's so enthused about the conversion he is starting a business on the side, hiring a driver to collect the oil and selling the surplus to other drivers. His wife of 43 years is all for the move, hoping it will keep him home more, although Hudson isn't saying whether he'll help with the cooking. For now he's content with a Mack CH juiced on veggie oil and the hope that others will place the same kind of order.

You want fries with that?