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**Homegrown  
Alternatives**

*An SBJ occasional series*



Charles Anderson's Golden Fuel Systems has developed an auxiliary fuel system that allows diesel vehicles to run on vegetable oil, and the company's clientele is growing as gas prices climb.

## Greased Lightning

**Golden Fuel Systems thrives as gas prices push customers to vegetable oil**

by Matt Wagner · mwagner@sbj.net

Some of Charles Anderson's earliest customers were "wide-eyed hippies" mesmerized by the notion of driving a Volkswagen powered by vegetable oil.

Today, his clientele includes farmers attached to their powerful pickups and business owners who manage small, diesel-dependent fleets.

And, of course, hippies.

Anderson is founder and president of Springfield-based Golden Fuel Systems, a company that's benefiting from skyrocketing diesel fuel prices.

Golden Fuel Systems eclipsed \$1 million in revenue in 2007, just six years after Anderson designed a parallel auxiliary fuel system that allows diesel vehicles to run on filtered vegetable oil.

A pickup equipped with the technology, for example, would have two separate fuel systems – one for diesel gas and another for vegetable oil. The diesel system starts the truck and heats viscous vegetable oil until it's runny. The driver then switches to the auxiliary system, which runs on a fuel most restaurants treat as waste.

Golden Fuel Systems' mechanics are facing a daunting, month-and-a-half backlog on installations, which take two to three days and range from \$1,200 for sedans to \$3,000 for semi-trailers, buses or RVs. The company also sells the conversion kits separately for \$1,000 to \$3,000, depending on the type of diesel guzzler

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# Fuel: Oil scarcity could be problematic

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awaiting a veggie-oil upgrade.

Anderson's been refining the system for years, and he's confident that Golden Fuel Systems' kits are now among the most efficient – and least problematic – products available to those considering vegetable oil as an alternative fuel.

"It's a very simple concept, but simple is not always easy," Anderson said. "I can't count how many people have tried to rip off my idea and design and fallen flat on their face. I just happen to have the right mix of technical ability and business skills."

## Frugality meets ingenuity

Anderson is an Alaska native who was drawn to the Ozarks a decade ago by cheap farmland that unified family members scattered across the country.

His family bought a 103-acre farm in Ozark County along the Arkansas border. There, he tinkered with diesel engines and vegetable oil, which can be mixed with methanol and lye to make biodiesel. That

process, however, creates glycerin, a byproduct used in soaps and lotions. Anderson acknowledged that his garage-based research was largely driven by a desire to save money.

"Everybody's motivated by different things," he said. "My first thing is I'm cheap. More than cheap, I like to be self-sufficient. The idea of me being more in control of my fuel than Exxon intrigued me."

After plenty of trial and error, Anderson successfully converted his Toyota pickup to run on vegetable oil. And when his idea hit the Web, there was no turning back.

"I had no clue the Pandora's Box I was going to open by putting that out on the Internet for people to learn about me,"

Anderson said.

In early September 2001, Anderson was preparing to launch his business when the Sept. 11 attacks stunned the world. He briefly considered delaying his plans, but decided to move forward with his company, Greasel Conversions, which immediately began receiving phone and e-mail inquiries.

Anderson changed the company's name to Golden Fuel Systems in April 2006, and later that year, he moved the headquarters to Springfield at 2025 E. Chestnut Expressway. The company leased space there through March before moving to 4220 W. Willard Road, Ste. B, near the Springfield-Branson National Airport.

Golden Fuel Systems, which employs seven in Springfield, now has franchises in Houston, Texas; Washington, D.C.; Tampa, Fla.; Logan, Utah; Oberlin, Ohio; and Hokkaido, Japan.

The only foreseeable obstacle for Golden Fuel Systems is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which has not expressly sanctioned the use of vegetable oil to fuel vehicles, but Anderson, who contends the emissions are markedly lower than other cars and trucks on the road today, isn't deterred.

"It's a huge gray area, with white shades in our favor," he said.

## A widening customer base

Gone are the days when Golden Fuel Systems primarily catered to fringe environmentalists, Anderson said.

As the average retail price for a gallon of diesel fuel soared to a record-breaking high of \$4 last month, the company's customer base has merged with the mainstream, Anderson said. He's now working on deals with businesses – some of them local – that hope to cut fuel costs by



Golden Fuel Systems' John Grant unbolts a fuel tank on a conversion van to install a custom-made unit necessary for the diesel engine to run on vegetable oil.



## Homegrown Alternatives

### Golden Fuel Systems

Owner: Charles Anderson

Founded: September 2001

Address: 4220 W. Willard Road, Ste. B

Phone: (866) 473-2735

Web site: [www.goldenfuelsystems.com](http://www.goldenfuelsystems.com)

Motto: "Fuel to Freedom"



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Grant's diesel-powered Mercedes-Benz has been reconfigured to run on vegetable oil by installing an additional fuel tank in the trunk, seen here, along with other components.

switching their fleets over to vegetable oil. But supply-side shortages remain a major concern for prospective clients who need fuel at their disposal.

Anderson gathers vegetable oil for his modified Ford Excursion from restaurants in rural areas near his home, but by all accounts, the discarded oil is getting harder to find.

Nathan Jones, a friend of Anderson's who drives a pickup that runs on vegetable oil, can attest to the scarcity.

"There's not a drop of grease to be had here in the Ozarks," said Jones, owner of Springfield-based Power Source Solar. "Charlie's got too many people running on these things. It's been a great gravy train, but I think the gravy train is about to end."

Matt Janssen is a Golden Fuel Systems customer who is well acquainted with the challenges of tracking down vegetable oil

for his 1994 Fleetwood Flair RV. Janssen, wife Sara and 4-year-old daughter Bella, of Iowa, are touring the country in the RV and documenting their eco-friendly travels at [www.livelihoodlytour.com](http://www.livelihoodlytour.com).

"You have to be a hunter; you have to have that mentality," Janssen said, noting that while in Georgia he found a 300-gallon drum of veggie oil behind an abandoned mall. "It's not just pulling off the interstate onto an exit and going to a fast-food joint."

The Janssens have traveled about 14,000 miles on vegetable oil, covering 25 states since September. The family is promoting Golden Fuel Systems in exchange for a discount, but Janssen said he'd recommend the company's products regardless of the agreement.

"We're kind of on the same mission," he said. "We're spreading their good news."