

## Growing Biodiesel from Local Fields

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*Greg McGuffey of Earthtone Builders fills his company truck up with biodiesel at Gas Up on Haywood Rd. in West Asheville in this 2008 file photo / JOHN COUTLAKIS*

ASHEVILLE — Farmers, area restaurants and energy-conscious drivers could benefit from a pilot program to develop homegrown biofuels in the mountains.

Blue Ridge Biofuels, AdvantageWest, Biltmore Estate and other partners have been awarded a \$130,000 grant from the Biofuels Center of North Carolina for a yearlong study of the F3 or “Field to Fryer to Fuel” program.

Blue Ridge Biofuels will produce edible oils from regionally grown oil seeds, sell these oils to restaurant partners for their frying needs and then recycle the used fryer oil into biodiesel.

“True sustainability is about getting multiple life cycles out of the same product,” said Woodrow Eaton, the managing partner of Blue Ridge Biofuels, which collects used vegetable oil from restaurants to create its biodiesel blends for area fleets and individual drivers.

“It’s part of our goal to grow the clean energy industry in this region. This project ties together agriculture jobs and food products as well as clean energy jobs,” said Matt Raker, vice president of AdvantageWest, the regional economic development agency.

Under the pilot program, Biltmore Estate will plant 50 acres of canola, expecting to harvest 126,000 pounds of canola seeds next spring.

Appalachian State University and N.C. State Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center will offer their expertise in growing oilseed crops.

ASU will lease its mobile oil pressing equipment to Blue Ridge Biofuels, and the first bottles of pressed oil could be used in Biltmore’s restaurants and other local dining next summer.

Blue Ridge Biofuels would then collect the used oil and recycle it into more than 5,000 gallons of biodiesel.

“We have local farms, a strong support for local food support and strong interest in sustainable energy, this could do really well in our area,” Raker said.

The state Biofuels Center is interested in seeing if the program could work elsewhere in the state.

“We believe that commercialization is important for our industry’s goal that by 2017, 10 percent of liquid fuels sold will come from biofuels grown and produced in our state,” said Kris Allsbury, contracts director for the center.

The center received 34 applications for projects. The AdvantageWest-sponsored project was one of only 12 projects receiving some \$1.5 million in funding.