

Liquid Gold

Ed Candioly

Why recycling your used cooking oil matters

For as long as there have been restaurants, there has been used cooking oil. In the past, once the oil had been used to cook delicious foods, it had no other purpose and was a headache for restaurants to dispose of easily and responsibly. But rendering companies, who for decades had been collecting and recycling animal by-products, soon realized that the oil, too, could be recycled. They began picking it up from restaurants and food-service facilities. Today, used cooking oil is being recycled into the base ingredients for everything from biofuels to makeup.

Yellow and Brown Grease

Renderers recycle used cooking oil (UCO) into a substance called "yellow grease." UCO is used as a high-energy feed additive in various livestock rations. It is also used to manufacture soap, make-up, paint, rubber, detergents and biofuels. Rendering companies process UCO from hundreds of thousands of restaurants, hotels, schools, hospitals, casinos and industrial kitchens throughout the country and provide yellow grease to biodiesel production facilities around the world.

The industrial need for yellow grease has created a market for the product from coast to coast. Depending on the market need, the product's value can rise and fall, often creating added income for restaurants as renderers compensate for collected UCO. The quantity and quality of the collected commodity, as well as the national market values, often dictate what the used oil is worth, and if a restaurant may get compensated for this product.

"Brown grease" is another product that renderers process. It is created from collecting and processing trap grease from interceptors at restaurants and food processors. Brown grease has a high fatty acid content and has traditionally been difficult to process into biofuels, but technologies have been catching up. Now, facilities are utilizing brown grease as a less expensive feedstock, improving profit margins for biofuel producers. More brown grease is being produced each year, and some speculate that it will be in higher demand for biofuel production as these newer technologies expand.

Top 5 Benefits of UCO Removal

There are many reasons why kitchens should recycle their used cooking oil. Here are the top five benefits to you, as a facility operator:

You get paid for UCO recycling.

Restaurants that have their UCO picked up may get paid for disposing of their waste. Oil that is reused as a feedstock yields approximately as much in biodiesel fuel. For example, one gallon of cooking oil can be converted into one gallon of biodiesel fuel. So, for every gallon you sell, you're helping to create a brand-new fuel source.

You help prevent blockages.

It is said that more than half of the sewage blockages in the U.S. are caused by incorrect oil disposal, i.e., dumping waste products down drains. Restaurants that recycle their UCO help to maintain a clean environment by preventing sewer backups. Restaurants that store and recycle used oil also avoid accidents and cleanliness issues.

UCO is beneficial to the environment.

Biodiesel is a renewable energy. When biodiesel releases CO₂, plants absorb and feed off the excess CO₂, which in turn reduces the CO₂ in the atmosphere and helps to slow climate change. Additionally, biodiesel decreases automobile emissions, minimizing dark smoke by more than half and decreasing brown haze, which contains cancercausing agents.

You're supporting renewable energy sources.

UCO itself is not a renewable energy. But after recycling, it can be made into a renewable source of energy. Recycling UCO increases the number of renewable energy sources on the planet, providing fuel for all types of diesel engines—including vehicles, trains and airplanes—that can support renewable fuel.

Your customers appreciate you.

Many restaurants market their sustainability as good will toward the environment and the future of our planet. Recycling used cooking oil is one sure way to make customers aware of your restaurant's commitment to such a worthy cause, while you make money doing it.

From the perspective of a facility owner or manager, recycling UCO and trap grease simply makes sense. Not only will you be providing raw materials for a wide variety of products but you, personally, will play a key role in ensuring that the environment remains clean for the future. And that's something we can all feel good about for generations to come.

Ed Candioly is National Account Manager of Baker Commodities Inc., a nationally trusted name in rendering and grease management since 1937. Candioly has been actively involved in the food service industry for more than 40 years and serves on a number of trade and culinary advisory boards.