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Foodlink turns spoilage into ethanol for vehicles

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Foodlink is partnering with a local alternative energy company to turn garbage into a bio-fuel that can power the organization's vehicles.

The project is a pilot for the regional food bank and Epiphergy, a company based in Pittsford. Together, the partners hope the concept of homegrown bio-fuel production will catch on.

"We are starting the organic fuel revolution in Rochester by taking food waste and other organic waste materials and using those to produce clean ethanol fuel," said Graham Fennie, founder of Epiphergy. "We anticipate (this) will grow into a much larger operation capable of producing hundreds of thousands if not millions of gallons of clean, renewable ethanol fuel for use in our community."

Foodlink distributes more than 11 million pounds of food to the community and food pantries a year. But Tom Ferraro, Foodlink's founder and executive director, said the operation has tons of spoilage each year that is disposed of in local landfills. Disposal and fuel costs are two of the Foodlink's largest expenses. The partnership is a step toward eliminating both.

"This is very exciting for us," he said. "We have the building, we have the waste and Graham has the know-how."

Epiphergy has set up shop inside one of Foodlink's buildings on Exchange Street in the city.

The waste food is shoveled into a grinder. It is mixed with a brew of enzymes, yeasts, bacteria, and other chemicals and pumped into fermentation tanks for three to five days. The solids are separated from the liquids. The solids become fertilizer; the liquids become fuel that is stored and pumped in an on-site filling station.

"This is the kind of process that could be scaled down to a very small business or a bar or restaurant and scaled all the way up to an operation support a regional waste collection," Fennie said. "But there is no reason that this couldn't be done in someone's garage. It already has — mine." ❑

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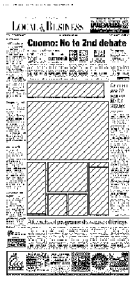

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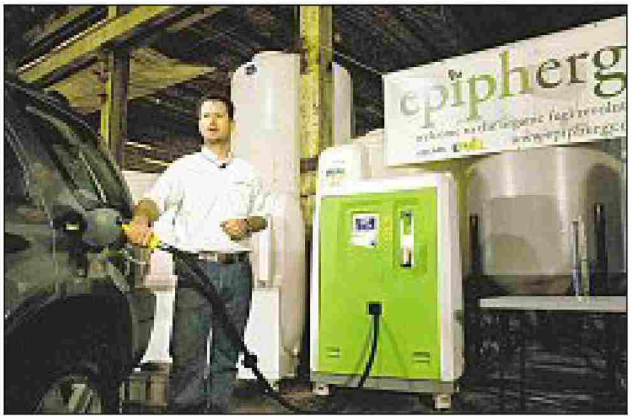
Photos by JEFFREY BLACKWELL staff photographer

Jim McMurtrie of Epiphergy shovels food waste Thursday into a grinder that feeds into a holding tank. Epiphergy and Foodlink are partnering to produce ethanol in Foodlink's buildings on Exchange Street.



Graham Fennie, founder of Epiphergy in Pittsford, hopes the idea of bio-fuel production catches on.

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