

MBA students believe in old frying fat

Did you know that there's money to be made from collecting used cooking oil and frying fat? This waste product is not actually worth anything to consumers, but offers an excellent solution for companies looking to replace fossil fuels.

Forty per cent of the used cooking oil and frying fat disposed of in Belgium is being poured down the drain and the situation is even worse in other European countries. The reason seems to be that it takes too much time and effort for people to go to the refuse tip. This is damaging to the environment, but it is also a missed opportunity for recycling. Five MBA students from Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School have found a better and even profitable solution: collect oil and fat from households and sell it for recycling into fuel, new plastics or even ecological soaps. In Belgium alone, the oil that is being thrown away has a market value of €3.8 million.

Prof. Hans Crijns, Kirsten Van Den Berge, Bart Deckers, Robert Carter, Paul Burns and Tim Heiremans.



The students call their project 'Fat4Fuel'. Brits Paul Burns and Robert Carter are responsible for the operational side, Bart Deckers for the legislative and financial aspects, while Tim Heiremans and Kirsten Van Den Berge are taking on the external contacts and marketing part of the project. They wrote their exceptional business plan during their MBA programme at Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School, prompted by the fact that frying fat is not currently being collected from households on a large scale anywhere in Europe. At their graduation ceremony on 7 July 2006, the School presented them with the Soudal Award for the best business plan.

Bart, Kirsten, Tim, Robert and Paul see a bright future in business for alternative fuels and recycling companies. "People are willing to contribute to a more sustainable lifestyle," explains Paul Burns (UK). "But the process has to be convenient, simple and easy to use. We would give householders a free can for the oil and then collect them door-to-door. So the only thing they have to do is put the cans out-

side with the other rubbish every month."

"We talked to several companies who guaranteed that they would buy all the oil we could supply," adds Bart Deckers (B). "For the generation of bio-fuel products, for conversion into a wide range of chemical products or as a substitute for traditional fossil fuel-based ingredients within their product portfolio. There really is a huge market for used frying fat."

Their business plan involves starting in Belgium, a country where people are crazy about French fries. After a couple of years they plan to expand into Europe, to the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, the UK and Germany, because the situation in these countries is similar. "We've found a gap in the market," says Robert Carter (UK). "Now we just need to find an investor who believes in our idea. And then we can get started." ■

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