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City of Industry to fuel trash trucks with cheese by-products

Food waste-to-energy plant would use UC Davis-licensed technology

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Celia Lamb](#) Staff writer

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The developers of a pilot plant that converts food waste into energy plan to build a larger facility in the City of Industry.

Davis-based **Onsite Power Systems Inc.** built its first plant near the **University of California Davis**, close to the campus wastewater treatment plant. Agricultural engineering professor Ruihong Zhang developed the technology, and the company licensed it from the university.

The Davis pilot plant can daily turn eight tons of kitchen scraps into enough compressed natural gas to run a car from Sacramento to New York City.



Denise McCoy | Sacramento Business Journal

Dave Konwinski of Onsite Power Systems Inc. also hopes to build a fuel plant in Minnesota.

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The City of Industry project would be 30 times larger and cost \$4 million to \$5 million.

Grand Central Recycling and **Transfer Station Inc.**, which has 20 acres in the City of Industry, proposed the project. The company owns **Valley Vista Services**, which hauls garbage in the city.

Grand Central has proposed a plant large enough to handle 250 tons of food waste daily. It would take a year to build and would produce enough biofuel daily to run its fleet of trash trucks, said Jeff Duhamel, president of **Waste Systems Technology Inc.**, a consultant for the City of Industry and Grand Central. A typical truck hauls about 10 tons of garbage per day.

City of Industry officials are considering building an additional food waste digester that would produce gas for electricity, Duhamel said. The city has good reason to curb its trash -- it goes to the Los Angeles County Sanitation District's Puente Hills Landfill, which closes in 2013. After that, Valley Vista would have to haul the trash to a more distant landfill at a higher cost.

The city has a lot of food processors who produce scraps, from cheese-making byproducts to imperfect tortillas. The city produces about 35,000 to 50,000 tons of pre-consumer food waste daily, Duhamel said.

"In many cases, the manufacturers are paying exorbitant fees to have that long-hauled," he added. "We want to offer them an alternative."

Grand Central aims to process about 50 percent of the city's food waste and 50 percent of its green waste through the proposed bioenergy project.

"It sounds like a utopian, hypothetical situation, but we are committed to it," Duhamel said.

Onsite Power chief executive officer Dave Konwinski said a commercial-scale project using his company's technology would pay for itself in three to five years through lower waste disposal fees, energy savings and/or energy sales.



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The Davis plant was built with funding from the state **Energy Commission**, the **Integrated Waste Management Board** and the **Propane Education and Research Council**. Propane powers the heaters that raise the temperature in anaerobic digestion tanks enough to culture the bacteria that break down the waste.

The plant is offline while new equipment is added to chop the waste into more consistent pieces before it goes into the tank. The equipment will let researchers test whether the plant can take larger waste such as crop residue, Zhang said. The plant is expected to come back online this month.

Onsite Power is trying to raise \$6 million through a profit-sharing deal with potential investors to open an office and hire staff. The company has about 70 shareholders, mostly friends and family.

The company currently operates from a portable trailer at the Davis site.

"Our port-a-potty around the corner is the executive rest room," Konwinski joked.

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