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## Students' Bus Powered by Vegetable Oil

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HAMILTON TOWNSHIP, N.J. (AP) - It's not unusual for the students traveling cross-country aboard an old school bus to get a craving for fried chicken. Or popcorn. Or french fries. That's because their vehicle is powered by vegetable oil, and the used oil they put in their tank can carry the telltale odors of the restaurant it came from.

"Sometimes it makes us hungry driving," says Thomas Hand, 21, one of 13 Middlebury College students who are traversing the country this fall to promote the use of alternative fuels. "You can fill up at the same place your car does."

The students actually have two vehicles: the bus that runs on biodiesel, an alternative fuel made from refined vegetable oil that's available at some gas station pumps; and a support car with a modified engine allowing it to run on used vegetable oil.

"Yesterday, we filled up at a Chinese restaurant," said Kyle von Hasseln, 22.

The students, including three environmental studies majors, took the fall semester off to make the 15,000-mile journey. It's similar to a trip eight of them took last summer, but this time it's more about promoting environmental consciousness than finding the best places to rock climb.

The undergrads set off two weeks ago from Vermont, planning to carry their message to schools and colleges, environmental and civic groups. They're scheduled to visit 22 cities and many rural locales before ending in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 8.

On Monday, they spent the morning at a science and technology high school in Monmouth County before making an afternoon presentation at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where they were planning to spend the night, said biobus passenger Stephen Swank.

Throughout the students' 90-day trip, their home is a 1991 GMC diesel bus, which is registered as an RV and painted with abundant yellow cornfields on the outside. Inside, it contains laptops, coolers, skateboards, camping and rock-climbing gear, books, writing desks, music, and a "rainy day box for silly, nostalgic amusement," which the occupants say will be opened only if they get stuck somewhere.

The biobus gets about 8 miles per gallon, roughly the same as a regular diesel-powered bus, Swank said. The bus maintains speeds similar to its diesel-fueled counterparts, Hand said.

The students are not the first to promote biodiesel as a domestic alternative to foreign oil. Singers Neil Young and Willie Nelson both power their tour buses with it.

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The group of Middlebury college students taking part in a cross-country trip aboard biobus, a bus fueled entirely by vegetable oil, meet in the back of the bus during a stop at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Monday, Sept. 27, 2004. (AP Photo/Mike Mergen)



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Unmodified diesel engines can run on biodiesel, said Swank. The support vehicle, a 1998 Volkswagen Jetta, was fitted with a heated fuel tank and fuel filter to enable it to run on used vegetable oil, he said. The students use it for grocery runs and to get around in cities where driving a bus is difficult.

"It smells like someone's cooking," said Swank.

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On the Net:

[www.projectbiobus.com](http://www.projectbiobus.com)

[www.biodiesel.org](http://www.biodiesel.org)

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