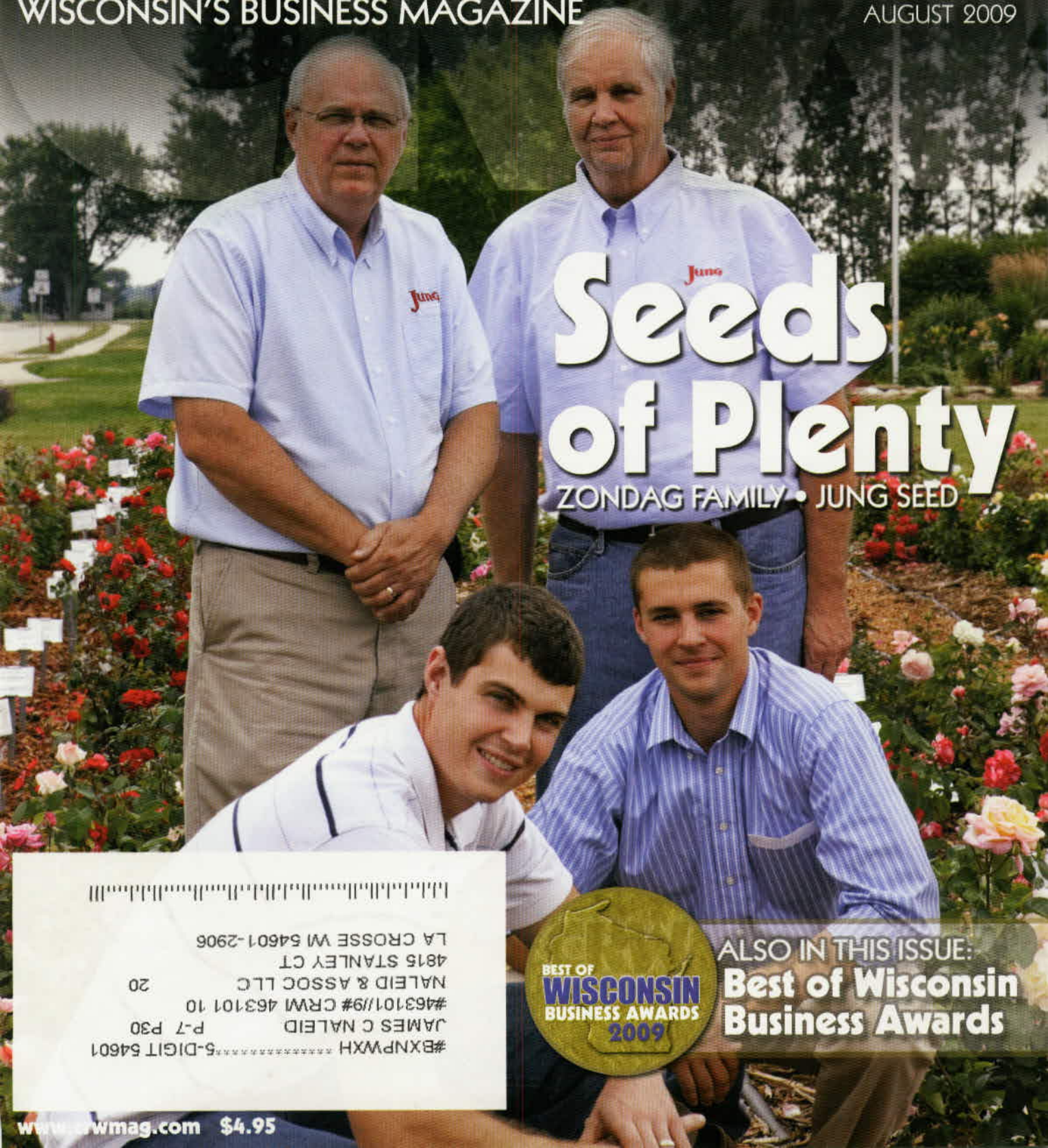


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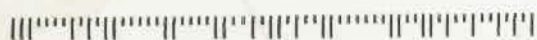
WISCONSIN'S BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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## Seeds of Plenty

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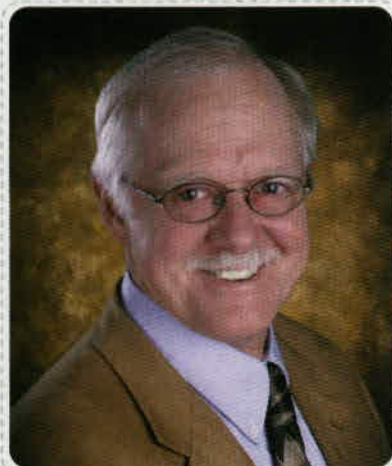


## Inov8 International finds profit in waste oil burners

**When Rebecca Faas,** president of Inov8

International of La Crosse, looks at the approximately 1 million restaurants in this country, she sees a vast potential market for the innovative waste oil burners her small, family-owned company makes.

"Anyone who has a fryer making French fries would be a candidate for our products, she says.



Indeed, Culver's of Pleasant Prairie has been using an Inov8 burner to heat much of the hot water used in the restaurant for three years. Ed Rich, the Culver's owner, says he's received a lot of favorable comments from people who've noted the restaurant's extra steps to use green energy and become more efficient. He says the restaurant saves between \$2,500 and \$3,500 in money not spent on natural gas each year. At the same time he's eliminated the cost of paying for someone to haul away the waste oil. The payback on his investment in the burner took about two years.

Inov8's new dual-fuel burner, which can burn both waste vegetable oil and natural gas, is being piloted at the Perkins Restaurant in Manitowoc. This burner can be used by a restaurant that does not generate the approximately 40 gallons of fryer oil each week needed for a good payback on investment. It also can be used where a restaurant does not have enough space for both a waste oil and a backup, natural-gas burner. Mark Ring, the Perkins restaurant owner, says he has saved "a couple of grand" in natural gas expenses and that he has found the Inov8 staff great to work with.

This summer, Inov8 is introducing a burner with a programmable logic control, a small computer that can automatically switch the dual-fuel burner from waste vegetable oil to natural gas when it senses the vegetable oil is running out or there is a blockage in the filter, Faas says.

Talks with major restaurant chains led to development of the programmable logic control, she adds. "Chains like Burger King and McDonald's want to uti-

lize fryer oil to heat water, but they don't have the space for a redundant system." And fast-food restaurant personnel may not have the time nor ability to operate a more complex burner system.

Developing the PLC and other innovations hasn't been easy. "The PLC project is very expensive and takes a long time to develop," Faas says.

That's where the state Department of Commerce's Wisconsin Energy Independence Fund comes in.

In September, Gov. Jim Doyle announced a \$135,000 grant to Inov8 among the \$1.38 million in grants to state firms for projects to implement technologies for biofuels. The grants are part of Doyle's Clean Energy Wisconsin strategy to promote renewable energy, create new jobs, increase the state's energy security and improve the environment. The goal of the strategy is producing 25 percent of Wisconsin's electricity and 25 percent of the fuel for cars and trucks from renewable sources by 2025.

"Without the grant we wouldn't have the funds to develop this technology (the PLC and dual-fuel burners)," Faas says.

Innovation has been the watchword at Inov8 since Faas's father, Harry Foust, began the business in 1990. He patented a burner that allowed auto service garages to heat their buildings with waste motor oil. Faas became the principal owner of the business in 1996.

The challenge in expanding from garages to restaurants has been the high flash point of vegetable oil and the need to ensure complete combustion of the fuel, Faas says.

Looking to the future, she foresees a big increase in business with the dual-fuel burner and PLC. That will allow the company to continue to live up to its philosophy: "Being smart about our natural resources and giving folks choices. By keeping wastes from landfills and utilizing them for heat energy, Inov8 relieves the demand for new fuels, saves energy costs and protects the environment—all at the same time." **CHW**

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