Beer: The next great alternative energy source

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Forget solar power. The future of energy is beer power.

I'm not talking about beer goggles that make you *feel* like you can invent the perfect form of alternative energy ... but actually using beer to power a brewery.

The Alaskan Brewing Co, is located in Juneau, Alaska and because of the unorthodox location of the brewery, they face a set of unique challenges related solely to the environment.

Typically, a brewery will sell its spent grain to local farms to feed to livestock. The residual malt and barley is otherwise useless, and because it contains high amounts of protein, it's actually good for the animals. Alaska Brewing Co. was struggling to turn a profit on their spent grain because there are so few farms in-state and shipping the grain to other farms cost them half of the $60 they were paid per ton. Plus, the expensive drying process for the wet grain was also cutting into profit, according to an article by the Associated Press [1].

So the brewers came up with an appropriately pioneer-minded solution. With the help of $500,000 grant from the federal Rural Energy for America Program, the company purchased a 1.8 million dollar furnace that was outfitted to burn the spent grain, creating steam, which in turn will power most of the brewing process.

Brandon Smith, the company's brewing operations and engineering manager, estimates the boiler will offset yearly energy costs by 70 percent (about $450,000 per year), according to the AP.

It may not solve the energy crisis, but it's an interesting solution to an age-old problem.

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