A pod filled with canola oil seed is broken open by Dave Johnson at the 35-acre field where Central Lakes College Ag Center Director Bob Schuler and Farm Manager Ron Nelson were harvesting the oil crop Monday. Oil pressed from the seed will power a converted tractor. The by-product of the seed pressing will be used for livestock feed. For more photos go to spotted.brainerddispatch.com.

Harvesting Canola for Fuel & Food

By STEVE KOHLS
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PILLAGER — Who would have thought that you could run a motor on the canola oil you have in your kitchen cupboard?

Central Lakes College Ag Center Director Bob Schuler and Ron Nelson, Central Lakes College Ag Center Farm Manager, harvested a 35-acre field of canola Monday near Pillager that may launch the college into a new world of fuel production. The goal was to plant the field on land donated by Anderson Brothers Construction, harvest it this week and have the canola pressed into oil on the Staples campus.

The goal is to power a farm tractor to run on straight vegetable oil in collaboration with the CLC Diesel Mechanics program. The tractor would be used for tilling the fields at the Ag Center on the Staples campus. All the by-product meal, after the pressing, will be sold for livestock feed. With the high cost of diesel fuel, the vegetable oil project will be a beginning for the Staples campus to create a fuel source for its farm machinery that is used at the Ag Center and a food source high in protein for local livestock growers.

The small scale bio-fuels project is being conducted to test the “Distributed Energy” concept. This involves growing the energy crops locally, processing them locally and consuming the fuel locally.

Dave Johnson, retired from Anderson Brothers Construction and a member of the Ag Center’s advisory board, was on hand to check the yield from the field. The non-irrigated land was subjected to long periods of heat and drought throughout the summer of 2012. The test is to grow a crop on marginal land that is viable as a fuel and feed source.