

# HIGHLANDER



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# Better, Most Cost Effective Way To Stay Warm

By Del Williams

Government bans, escalating costs, and unexpected shortages have many turning from wood burning stoves to appliances that can switch between a variety of fuel options.

For families already experiencing the pain of high home heating costs, one thing is sure to be a continual source of frustration: paying even higher costs down the road because they are locked into a fuel whose price keeps rising. Or worse, not being able to buy the fuel at all due to shortages, restrictions on emissions, or other circumstances beyond their control.

As a result, many families are instead turning to stoves, which can provide clean, low cost, and energy-efficient home heating with a variety of fuel sources including some "future fuels" now becoming available. This can provide home heating security for families not only during the cold winter



months but also year-round for decades to come.

Too Cold for Too Long - The trouble comes from relying on a single home heating fuel source. Whether that source is wood, corn, wood pellets, propane, kerosene, fuel oil, or electricity, uncontrollable factors such as price volatility, shortages, or emission restrictions can put a family's ability to stay warm at risk. It can also force a family to invest in a

new appliance that could face similar challenges in the future if it relies on a single fuel source. This can leave families feeling trapped.

"We were tired of how much it cost to keep the house barely warm, tired of wearing extra clothes indoors and piling on blankets," says Beth Gasser, who along with her husband Steve and three daughters live in a 3,300 sq. ft., three-story home in Hutchinson, Minn.

The challenge in home heating will not be resolved by the traditional wood stove, which is at risk of being banned in some areas or restricted as regulatory standards for air quality tighten. Citizens of Libby, Montana, for instance, found themselves unable to use wood burning stoves when their air did not meet the EPA's national air quality standards, and were required to replace existing units with cleaner-burning EPA-certified units.

Although cleaner burning options like wood pellet stoves are now a popular alternative, even this fuel source became unavailable to many homeowners across the U.S. Northwest and Canada during a severe shortage in 2008. This occurred when the rising cost of home heating fuels led to the popularity of the wood pellet stove. Unfortunately, wood pellets, a construction byproduct made from sawdust, became increasingly unavailable due to a down economy, which slowed construction, and homeowners who rushed to stockpile the pellets.

Gasser, like a growing number of consumers, was cautious about being locked into any one-fuel source, instead

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opting for a multi-fuel burning stove from American Energy Systems. The Hutchinson, Minn.-based company has engineered a stove capable of burning a variety of renewable fuels including corn, wheat, wood pellets, biomass, and more. Biomass fuels are usually made from organic materials such as grass and other plant-based waste. The EPA, in fact, invited AES to burn one of their biomass stoves on the White House lawn during a conference as an illustration of the fuels of the future.

The Countryside Pedestal model stove Gasser purchased was installed in the main floor family room, and provides ample heat for the entire home, plus direct radiant heat that makes the room a favorite gathering place on cold winter nights.

“We burn mostly corn because we can buy it in bulk from our neighbors down the street,” says Gasser. “But if there’s a storm, hail, drought or anything that makes corn too costly or unavailable, we can switch to other fuels such as wood pellets, wheat, barley, or biomass pellets at any time. The multi-fuel stove gives us options, and we’re saving about \$3,000 a year in home heating costs.”

According to Mike Haefner, President of AES, the key to burning a variety of fuels today as well as the fuels of the future is a scientific approach to stove design. In figuring out how to make corn burn optimally, for example, AES employs a team of chemists and scientists to determine how to make corn burn cleanly, continually, and efficiently.

Self-Sufficient and Saving \$2,500/Year in Home Heating Cost - Dan Deboer, a Kalamazoo, Mich. homeowner, believes in self-sufficiency. Deboer, his wife Jan, and his youngest son live in their 2,500 square ft., two-story farmhouse on a 200-acre property where he and his brother raise hay, corn, and heifer cows.

Deboer began burning corn in his stove for home heating when its price was low. When the price of corn rose, he switched to wood pellets. “But a few years back, I couldn’t buy wood pellets at any of our stores,” says Deboer. “My friends and neighbors couldn’t buy wood pellets either because there was a shortage and they were in trouble.”

Deboer was able to turn to a free, local, burnable source of biomass product, a plant-based waste from a company that extracts oil from herbs. He purchased a pellet-making

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machine and began making his own biomass pellets to burn in his multi-fuel stove.

“I’m now taking a free waste product and turning it into heat and saving about \$2,500 a year in fuel costs,” says Deboer. “If you want to become more self-sufficient, save money, help the environment, or reduce America’s dependence on foreign fuel, multi-fuel stoves are a great place to start.” Units such as those from AES can be powered by electricity, solar, wind, and even DC power for maximum energy efficiency off the grid. For more info, call 800-495-3196; or visit [www.americanenergysystems.com](http://www.americanenergysystems.com)  
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