



Focus On

Industrial Hemp

Industrial hemp—one of the strongest natural fibers in the plant kingdom—is a non-drug variety of the species *Cannabis sativa*. A highly versatile crop, it can be used for fiber or oil in thousands of potential products—from paper to construction materials, fuel to clothing. Growing this crop, which is cultivated all over the world, would benefit our economy and help protect our environment.

Benefits

Industrial hemp can be a particularly sustainable crop. It chokes out weeds, leaving a weed-free field for the next crop. In rotation with crops such as wheat, crop yields increase. Requiring few or no pesticides or herbicides, industrial hemp helps to minimize toxics in the environment. It also reduces toxics when used in paper, because its natural brightness avoids chlorine bleaching, which produces dioxin—a powerful environmental toxin. Since it can replace wood fiber in most applications, it is one of the fibers that can help to reduce destruction of the world's forests. When added to recycled paper, its long fibers help increase the number of times that paper can be recycled. Recyclable hemp-based biocomposites can replace notoriously non-recyclable glass-filled materials in automobile parts. And, due to its fast-growing quality, hemp is a good candidate for bio-based fuels, which one day could help increase our domestic energy supply and ease our dependence on foreign oil.

Industrial Hemp Around the World

As a result of the crop's utility and society's growing focus on more environmentally preferable materials, industrial hemp has been experiencing a renaissance in most industrialized countries. In the 1970s, the European Union began offering subsidies to industrial hemp farmers. The United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Australia, France, China, Hungary, Ukraine, India, Russia and Romania, among other countries,

grow the crop today. Some of these countries have never outlawed its cultivation, while others began in the early 1990s to allow its cultivation under a regulated process. As a result, by 1998, world hemp production was approximately 100,000 metric tons.

Is it a drug?

Although industrial hemp is the same species as the plant marijuana, it is an entirely different variety—similar to comparing a Chihuahua to a Saint Bernard. Industrial hemp has a much lower concentration of the psychoactive element, delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Cumulative studies have shown that the industrial hemp used in many countries, with THC levels at 0.3 percent, produces no psychoactive effect in humans. Industrial hemp's potential to be abused as an illicit narcotic is analogous to that of poppy seed bagels or non alcoholic beer—although these foods have a psychoactive component, it is so small that it is virtually impossible to abuse them.

The Federal Government's Policy

Even though the United States is a signatory to international drug treaties that exclude industrial hemp from control, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) treats the plant as a Schedule 1 controlled substance—the most restrictive category under the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970. But, the legislative record of that Act gives no indication that Congress intended to ban industrial hemp.

Although classification of industrial hemp as an illicit substance was never the intent of Congress, the DEA has acted zealously to assert their authority, prohibiting commercial cultivation (but not the import of hemp materials). Therefore, DEA allows

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American manufacturers to import hemp from other countries, but prohibits American farmers from commercially growing industrial hemp.

America's founders, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, strongly supported industrial hemp production. And, while hemp production rose and fell in the intervening years, during World War II it enjoyed a renaissance. Suffering from a fiber shortage, the U.S. Army and the Department of Agriculture sponsored a "Hemp for Victory" campaign that urged farmers to grow industrial hemp to meet the war needs. More than 400,000 acres of industrial hemp were cultivated in the United States, and 42 hemp mills were created between 1942 and 1945.

States Take a Stand

Farmers, business leaders, consumers, and environmentalists around the country are asking government to allow the cultivation of industrial hemp. A dozen states—including Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia—have enacted pro-industrial hemp legislation and resolutions. Bills are pending in additional states. The acts and resolutions have called on the federal government to allow the commercial cultivation of industrial hemp, authorized the production of industrial hemp, or appropriated funds to study the crop—its feasibility, desirability, cultivation, production, processing and marketing.

In 1999, the State of Hawaii obtained from the DEA the United States' only permit to grow a demonstration plot of industrial hemp. Still in operation, the project is required to have a chain link fence topped by razor wire and a 24-hour infrared security system.

Allowing Industrial Hemp in the US

Countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom allow for the commercial, but regulated cultivation of industrial hemp. The United States could adopt a similar system in which both law enforcement concerns and the interests of U.S. businesses and farmers in growing industrial hemp are addressed.

Under a regulated system, farmers wishing to grow industrial hemp, would have to obtain a license from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The crops would have to be grown only from USDA certified seeds. And, growers would have to consent to USDA inspections of industrial hemp fields and processing facilities.

For more information on our campaign to allow the commercial cultivation of industrial hemp in the United States, see our website at www.woodconsumption.org/hemp.

Is There a Market?

One of the largest markets for industrial hemp is biocomposites. One industry study estimates that natural fiber biocomposites will grow from a \$150 million North American market in 2000 to \$1.4 billion in 2005. Another study shows that industrial hemp biocomposites specifically will increase their market share globally by 30 to 40 percent by 2005. Johnson Controls, Inc., is already producing an automobile door panel using 25 percent industrial hemp in its Holland, Michigan plant. GM, Ford, Chrysler, Mercedes, Audi and BMW use hemp parts in their cars.

Interface, Inc., a \$1.2 billion carpet business, has researched and tested hemp as a fabric for its carpets and wants to use domestically-cultivated industrial hemp in its production. A number of prominent clothing companies—including Patagonia, Inc., Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, J. Crew and Walt Disney Company—have manufactured hemp clothing and accessories. Several specialty paper companies, including Crane Paper Co., which makes the U.S. currency, incorporate hemp fiber in their paper lines. The Body Shop, a billion dollar per year cosmetics manufacturer, uses hemp in a number of best-selling products.

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