

**WTE of Nov. 12, 2014. Editor's headline: "Wyoming Hemp would have plenty of buyers"**

Industrial hemp, marijuana's non-intoxicating cousin, provides for anything from clothing to cooking oil. Inasmuch as the 2014 federal farm bill allows pilot growing programs, hemp could soon be cultivated across the states, clearing the way for US farmers to compete in an industry currently dominated by China. Already 41 states as well as Puerto Rico have introduced pro-hemp language; of these, 25 have passed pro-hemp statutes, while the following have removed all barriers to hemp production: California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia. The most recent election added Washington D.C. and Alaska to the list.

If and when Wyoming actively pursues industrial hemp, state agencies and growers may find themselves doing business with companies like these:

"Hemp Traders" flourishes in Los Angeles. Founded twenty-three years ago by Lawrence Serbin, the company offers anything from raw hemp to textiles fashioned from hemp. In conversation Mr. Serbin disclosed that, currently, his company's hemp is grown in China.

"These past twenty years I've traveled to China at least once a year," he said.

I asked if he envisioned purchasing US-produced hemp fiber. He'd love to, he said, but the lack of infrastructure makes it cumbersome to process and ship the fiber domestically. On the other hand, securing it from abroad presents its own challenges. "At the moment hemp fiber is in short supply in China," he said. "If you had large quantities of good-quality stuff, they'd buy it off you."

He finds the Chinese way of harvesting the fiber manually superior to the processing machines he saw in Europe. A follow-up email elaborated:

"I have been to China during the harvest season and participated in harvesting the hemp. . . . If farmers in the U.S. were able to grow hemp, then I would probably see about buying some of my products from them. Or even shipping the hemp back to China to be made into textiles."

Another US company, "Hemp Basics," has been selling hemp products in Warren, New Jersey, since 1991. I spoke with the company's founder/owner, who identified himself as Steve. He said he imports raw hemp from Romania. His website, I found, is a wellspring of information, not only on hemp products but also on the growing, maintaining, harvesting, and storing of hemp seed and hemp fiber. The following information is drawn from that website:

Hemp may require up to three years to acclimatize to a new locale. Experimental plots should be produced to develop a localized strain before committing to large-scale cultivation. The best variety should be selected with careful consideration for the differences in yields of seed and stalk, maturation (early or late), and fiber content. Errors can result in a shortfall of 30% or more.

On the site, David Marcus's 1997 "Commercial Hemp: An Economic Justification" compares hemp to three other crops: canola, grain corn, and spring wheat. By comparison, hemp is by far

the most profitable crop of choice:

“I estimate that growing for seed and fiber will generate long term combined revenues of \$244-430/acre. The total expected costs of growing hemp for seed are \$237/acre; even in a ‘worst case’ scenario. . . [yield is] better than the expected return from spring wheat.”

Hemp’s returns are more than double that of the next best crop, Ontario canola, while the highest estimates (which Macus considers conservative) “are really quite exceptional compared to the other crops.” The study goes on to an in-depth analysis of hemp oil, its cultivation cost and revenue-producing potential.

“HempTech” is a subsidiary that represents FutureWorld’s technology division. Located in Florida, HempTech caters to the industrial hemp market by providing state-of-the-art hemp farming technologies as well as sensor technology, data analysis for smart cultivation, and consultation for industrial hemp. Its parent company capitalizes on the cannabis market globally and focuses on the identification, acquisition, development, and commercialization of products like industrial Hemp.

“Natural Emphasis” is a Canadian company promoting hemp for economic development that’s environmentally sustainable: “We have been actively involved in researching hemp, disseminating information, and challenging common misconceptions about hemp since 1994,” states its website. Past projects have focused on public education, market surveys, hemp feasibility studies, and articles on the economics and agronomics of commercial hemp production. Clients and partners range from the Ontario Hemp Alliance to Aboriginal Business Canada to independent Canadian farmers and entrepreneurs.

In 1998 only 44 registered varieties of hemp existed, with a gene pool acclimatized to Europe, Canada, and the northern states of the US. The limited base could make hemp crops vulnerable; still, our state will likely follow Colorado’s example and obtain start-up seed from Canada. Wyoming farmers from Lusk to Wheatland are hoping it’ll happen soon.