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HEMP SWEEPSTAKES

Washington farmers join resurgent effort to grow a crop whose legality is complex and economics are unclear

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Moses Lake farmer Shane Palmer drove a seed drill across a Central Washington field earlier this month and planted hemp, marking the state's entry into the country's resurgent hemp era.

Palmer said he wanted to diversify his crop line-up and try something new, and that he expects the hemp in the fall to be waist to chest high.

His business partner, Cory Sharp, is already in it up to his neck. He founded a business, HempLogic, and contracted with farmers to plant 115 acres, a high-stakes commercial plunge into what's ostensibly a "research program."

Sharp has spent the past year researching, and coping, with the crop's legal complexities and uncertain economics. The plants are growing, but he still needs to find buyers.

"It can be disheartening," he said. "We're pioneering something we don't have a home for."

Generations of American farmers once grew hemp for paper, textiles and other industrial uses. But beginning in the 1930s, federal policy has been based on the premise



Photos by Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Farmer Shane Palmer jumps down from a seed planter as he prepares to put in hemp June 6 near Moses Lake, Wash. The farm became the first in Washington to lawfully plant hemp.

that hemp provides cover for marijuana. Even during World War II, as the USDA promoted production for such military uses as parachutes and shoelaces for combat boots, hemp farmers had to register with the federal government.

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Hemp grows in an Oregon field.

"Oh, it's a dance, and I hate it. We're still just stumbling along."

COLLEEN KEAHEY
Executive director of the Hemp Industries Association



Capital Press graphic



Capital Press file photo

The EPA's announcement it intends to rescind the Waters of the U.S. rule and take another crack at defining waters of the U.S. under the Clean Water Act drew cheers Tuesday from farm organizations.

Farm groups cheer EPA move to roll back WOTUS

Controversial rule meant to define waters of U.S. under Clean Water Act

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers said on Tuesday they are proposing a rule to rescind the 2015 Clean Water Rule meant to define waters of the United States that are regulated under the Clean Water Act.

The rule kicked up a storm of controversy, with the agricultural community, states and businesses contending it greatly expands federal regulatory authority in the Clean Water Act in violation of congressional intent.

Legal challenges to the rule resulted in a stay of its implementation by the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in October 2015. In February, President Trump issued an executive order for a review of the rule.

On Tuesday, EPA announced that the agency, along with the Department of the Army and the Army Corps of Engineers, intends to rescind the rule, recodify the regulatory text in place prior to the rule and commence rulemaking to reevaluate and revise the definition of waters of the U.S.

Reaction from agricultural groups was swift.

"Farmers and ranchers across this country are cheering EPA's proposal today to ditch its flawed waters of the U.S. rule," Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau Federation president, said in a statement.

Farmers and ranchers know the importance of clean water and work hard every day to protect natural resources, he said.

"But this rule was never really about clean water. It was a federal land grab designed to put a straight-jacket on farming and private business across the nation," he said.

EPA's announcement shows EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt recognizes the rule for what it is — "an illegal and dangerous mistake that needs to be corrected," he said.

The National Association of Wheat Growers applauded EPA for rescinding the rule.

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Hemp consultant and advocate Joy Beckerman watches hemp being planted in a field near Moses Lake in Central Washington. A state senator says Beckerman made skeptical legislators "aware of what it's all about."

County, Azure Farms reach agreement on weed control

Issue riled up rural Oregon county, brought unwanted attention on social media

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

Sherman County, Ore., commissioners and Azure Farms have agreed to a weed control plan that may settle a dispute that pitted the organic operation and its supporters against conventional wheat growers who don't want weeds spreading into their crops.

The farm, near Moro in the north-central part of the state, agreed to control weeds, with "control" defined as "little or no noxious weed seed production that would affect neighboring fields" and spread by the wind. Conventional farmers are chiefly concerned about seeds from Rush Skeleton, Canada thistle, White top,

Diffuse napweed and Morning Glory, or Bindweed.

The agreement allows Azure Farms to use any method it sees fit, while the county's weed district has the right to monitor Azure's fields, pastures and range ground for compliance. County employees can access the fields by permission and appoint-

ment only, and must be accompanied by Azure Farms staff, according to the agreement.

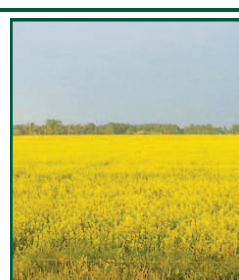
If a weed patch is in more than 50 percent flower production, Azure Farms will have seven days or a "mutually agreed upon reasonable amount of time" to take action. If it doesn't, Sherman County can spot-spray the weeds and mark the area in hopes the

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