HARVEST: Hemp is a new crop for Sisters Country

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The Cyrus family planted about 30 acres total in what may become a significant agricultural industry in the region.

"We've planted more than 100 different strains and (are) trying to identify what works and what doesn't work in Central Oregon — or at least in our climate," Matt said. "We've definitely identified some winners and losers."

The operation has had an impact on people living in the area, as frost-abatement operations — including using helicopters to stir the air enough to prevent frost from forming on plants — have disrupted some folks' sleep in the area for several weeks. Some have told *The Nugget* that they've gone so far as to leave for the duration.

"In order to protect the plants from killer frosts, we employed both wind machines and — as needed on very cold nights — helicopters to force the warmer air down to ground level," Cyrus said. "We found that the air at 100 feet above the ground is generally about 20 degrees warmer than at ground level."

Cyrus told *The Nugget* that he's stopped the helicopter flights. People may continue to hear wind-generating machines till the end of the harvest — "the fans probably — the helicopters, no.

"Harvest has been underway since mid-October and is expected to last another 10 days to two weeks," Cyrus told *The Nugget*. "We are currently employing about 25 people to help with the harvest, which includes hand-cutting and transporting to one of various locations to be hung to dry. This process is similar to drying tobacco. Once dried, it will be further processed and then have the oil extracted from the leaves and flowers. The cannabidiol (CBD) extract will then be sold for use in products from lotions and creams to supplements or infused products.

PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Hemp harvesting resembles harvesting tobacco.

"The market is exploding with CBD-infused products," Cyrus said. "CBD can now be found in energy drinks, beer, hard alcohol, honey sticks, chocolates, and many other products."

Cyrus emphasized the experimental nature of the crop.

Industrial hemp is distinct from its relative, marijuana; by regulation it can only contain a tiny percentage of THC, the chemical compound that creates the high associated with marijuana use.

Hemp has myriad uses — from paper products and clothing made out of the fiber to food (hemp hearts are featured at Costco) to use of hemp oil for industrial lubrication and skin-care products. Hemp can also be used to create biodegradable plastics.

Hemp-derived CBD oils are believed to have a range of medicinal benefits in treating chronic conditions.

Cyrus told *The Nugget* that he hopes to identify what works from this crop and next year hopefully plant earlier in the season with a target of a mid-September harvest. An earlier harvest would likely avoid the need for the level of frost abatement required this season.

"It's a new crop and we're all learning how it works," Cyrus said.

(Editor's note: Jerry Baldock contributed to this report).

Start preparing now for next fire season

Through November 12, local residents are encouraged to define their defensible space by taking advantage of the half-price yard-debris days. Residents can recycle their yard debris at Deschutes Recycling for half-price – $2 per cubic yard.

FireFree encourages residents to complete their fall clean up and maintenance of defensible space by bringing branches, leaves, shrubs and pine needles to Deschutes Recycling during this event. The effort will help residents to prepare well before next fire season. Residents can take advantage of this event as an alternative to fall burning and recycle the combustible vegetation inside the 30-100 feet of defensible space around their homes.

FireFree reminds you to take a look around your property in the "home ignition zone" where glowing embers can ignite spot fires and vulnerable areas like decks, patios and fences that can spread flames to your home. Where are your most vulnerable places for glowing embers to ignite your home?

Are your gutters and roof valleys free from debris like pine needles and leaves? Clean them out. Despite a metal or asphalt shingle roof, the buildup of gutter debris provides necessary fuel for the glowing embers to ignite adjacent fascia boards or siding – most often made of wood.

Do your shrubs and weeds provide a path of fuel for fire to reach your trees or home? Reduce shrubs and other "ladder fuels" around your home to reduce the threat of ground fires igniting nearby trees, or your home.

What can catch fire on your deck or patio or near your fence? Remove weeds, shrubs or any combustible materials from around, under or on top of your deck, patio or wood fence. This includes toys, planters, construction materials, patio furniture and cushions along with even small piles of pine needles or leaves.

Residents can recycle yard debris at Deschutes Recycling for half-price: $2 per cubic yard.

FireFree is a year-round effort to educate community members and increase resident participation in preparing for wildfires. Residents are encouraged to visit www.FireFree.org for more information about defensible space, reducing the structural vulnerability of homes and getting prepared for fire season.

For more information about FireFree activities in your area, call your local fire department or Project Wildfire at 541-322-7129.

Deschutes Recycling is located at Knott Landfill and open Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 61050 S.E. 27th St., Bend. Deschutes Recycling and Knott Landfill are closed on Sundays and holidays.

Visit the FireFree website at www.firefree.org for more information about how you can prepare your property for wildfire season.

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