

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Hemp center at Oregon State Univ. site is welcome

Oregon State University opened its Global Hemp Innovation Center last week, at its North Willamette Research and Extension Center just north of Aurora. The timing for the center, which aims in part to help growers with the growing market for hemp and hemp products, couldn't be much better, considering the explosive growth in demand that experts expect to see for those products.

Truth be told, growers probably could have used the assistance a couple of years before, as Oregon farmers started experimenting with growing industrial hemp — which is similar to marijuana, but with much less THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, the principal psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. (Industrial hemp contains less than 0.3% THC under U.S. government standards; no one is getting high by smoking this stuff.)

But you can understand why OSU was reluctant to act before diving deep into hemp research: Until the most recent version of the farm bill passed last year, hemp was illegal under federal law. In theory, getting too involved with hemp could have put the university's substantial federal research grants at risk. (It's another example of the federal government's ludicrous record regarding marijuana; for another example, look at Congress' inability to pass any kind of law regarding banks and other financial institutions that want to work with legal pot businesses.)

You also can see why OSU experts and the state's farmers have been champing at the bit to start working with industrial hemp: Oregon has an ideal climate for growing the crop, and licensed hemp acreage in Oregon has increased sixfold since last year. Oregon is the No. 3 state for hemp cultivation after Montana and Colorado, according to Vote Hemp, a group that advocates for and tracks the industry in the United States. Across the nation, hemp cultivation is booming as well: Vote Hemp said the number of licensed acres of hemp jumped 204% from 2017 to 2018.

And the market for a hemp-derived extract called cannabidiol, or CBD, is expected to grow from \$618 million in 2018 to \$22 billion in 2022 as its popularity as a health aid skyrockets.

But CBD just scratches the surface of the potential industrial hemp offers, said Jay Noller, a professor of crop and soil science at OSU, and the new center's director and lead researcher. "We want to understand how to efficiently and sustainably grow hemp for seeds, for hemp fiber materials that can be used in textiles and construction materials, including as an alternate to gravel in concrete, for hemp essential oils that have popular health and wellness uses, and for hemp grain for use in foods and feed," he said. No wonder, he noted, that the global demand for hemp is less than 10% of the supply. That sort of mismatch is a virtual guarantee that farmers are going to take notice.

But the crop faces growing pains, in no small part because of the just-ended federal prohibition. And that means there's a lot of work ahead for researchers at the OSU facility and at similar university-backed centers around the country.

For example, nascent hemp farmers will want to be sure that they're buying seeds that won't yield a crop with too-high levels of THC; such "hot" crops have to be destroyed, and farmers often can't tell for sure until months after they've planted the seeds. A program to certify seeds would be a big step forward. (On a similar note, we expect that a small fortune awaits the company that develops an effective portable system to test shipments of industrial hemp for THC levels; such a system would go a long ways toward easing some of the cross-state transportation headaches that have plagued the industry.)

These sorts of bumps in the road are to be expected, especially in this unique case in which a commodity's status switched from prohibited to legal overnight. We expect OSU's hemp facility will play a big role in smoothing out those bumps — and will give a boost to farmers who believe that hemp could bring them some big paydays.



Your views

Cimon: Learn the facts at B2H public hearing Thursday

address is www.stopb2h.org.

Norm Cimon
La Grande

To the Editor:

As I write this letter, all of Argentina and Uruguay, as well as parts of Brazil, have just experienced a total electrical failure. More than 40 million people are affected. In The Observer in May of last year, I pointed out that large blackouts are a "feature" of large power grids. They happen all the time and they will continue to happen. A high-voltage line with a 500 kilovolt rating, such as the proposed Boardman-to-Hemingway line, can even lead to more frequent power failures. That is the reality.

We need to plan for a grid that works from the bottom up — like the Internet — and not top down. That's the only way to deal with what will be thousands of new power sources thanks to renewable energy and battery storage. There are proposals to do just that. It's time to step away from business as usual and to plan for distributed generation with consumers becoming producers.

I'd encourage everyone to consider attending the Oregon Energy Facilities Siting Council hearing in La Grande on June 20. The EFSC is examining the feasibility of the proposed route of the B2H line, and they want to hear from you. All of the information you need to see where the process is and how you can participate can be found on the website of the local group that has been working on the issues. The

Barber: MERA continues to be managed for all users

To the Editor:

After reading the letter by Steve West on what he calls the mismanagement of MERA, it appears there must be some misinformation going around. I would like to clarify some things Steve brought up.

First, cattle grazing has not been permanently stopped but it has been put on hold for at least "cow poop." It is about people investing their time and energy to build a trail, sometimes hundreds of man hours, and then in a single day have all of that work destroyed by cattle. The MERA Advisory Committee has a subcommittee that is working with the adjacent land-owners and others to come up with a solution to this problem that will satisfy all sides. Also, cattle grazing has yet to create any revenue for the county.

As for timber management, when the property was purchased, two-thirds of the timber volume was cut as part of the sale agreement. Three years ago, a 500-plus-acre sanitation harvest took out dead and dying timber to keep diseases from spreading to healthy trees. There is another thinning project of approximately 100 acres taking place this month. Over the next two years, there is a plan to thin either

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side of Road 201 and FS Road 3120 as a fire break. They are continuing to carry out the forest management plan developed by the Society of American Foresters Blue Mountains Chapter and trying to catch up with backlogged projects over the next three years.

MERA was purchased with a \$4.4 million grant from the Oregon State Parks OHV grant program and a \$250,000 grant from Blue Mountain Habitat Restoration. The OHV grant program is funded by the sale of OHV permits and a percentage of gasoline taxes that OHV users pay. Parks was generous enough to give the grant even though the BMHR grant prohibited motorized recreation on more than one-third of the property.

MERA continues to be managed for all users and compatible uses. For more factual information on how MERA is managed, you can visit www.meetmera.org.

Mark Barber
La Grande

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