

Industrial hemp challenging, rewarding for Halfway couple

Hans Hammar and Hopi Wilder recently harvested their second crop of the versatile plant

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

RICHLAND — Hans Hammar steps out of a 100-foot-long greenhouse from which a pungent aroma wafts, extends his right hand to greet a visitor and then, as suddenly as if he had seen a possibly venomous snake, he yanks his hand back.

Hammar grins and, by way of explanation, twists his wrist to display his grime-encrusted palm.

“It’s pretty sticky,” he says.

Harvesting and processing industrial hemp can be messy that way.

The five-person crew working for Hammar on his Karuna Hemp Farm on this mild and sunny October morning in the Eagle Valley all don gloves in deference to the resin-rich crop, but Hammar’s hands remain bare.

It’s his custom, said Hammar’s fiancée, Hopi Wilder.

“He never wears gloves,” she says with a smile.

An appropriate predilection, perhaps, for what is a decidedly hands-on farming operation.

Although not as hands-on as in 2018, when Karuna Hemp Farm harvested its first crop from 2 acres in the Eagle Valley, about 43 miles east of Baker City.

(Karuna, according to the farm’s website, karunahemp.com, “is a word from Sanskrit, an ancient East Indian language. It is translated as any action that is taken to diminish the suffering of others or ‘compassionate action.’ We chose this name because we believe hemp is an extremely helpful plant.”)



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Hans Hammar, left, and his fiancée, Hopi Wilder, are excited about the future prospects for growing industrial hemp in eastern Baker County.

Last year, Wilder said, they both planted and harvested all 2,500 hemp plants by hand.

“It took a month,” she said, referring to the planting process. “It was a total community effort. We had friends and family. So many wonderful people came out to help us.”

But that labor-intensive method of planting wasn’t sustainable.

This year, Wilder said with a chuckle, the farm “moved into the 20th century.”

“We actually bought a tractor,” she said.

More critically, they acquired a used transplanting machine that sets the hemp plants into the

fertile soil which, along with its relatively beneficent climate, has made Eagle Valley a prime farming zone for a century and a half.

Adding the transplanter to Karuna Hemp Farm’s inventory was a challenge, however.

Wilder said the rapidly rising popularity of growing hemp — a type of cannabis which, unlike marijuana, contains only tiny amounts of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in pot — has made the market for farm equipment extremely competitive.

Wilder and Hammar finally found a transplanter that would work for them — in Michigan.



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Hemp plants dry on racks in long rows inside the greenhouse owned by Karuna Hemp Farm. The plants dry for about two weeks before the flowers are removed.

With the aid of mechanized equipment the farm’s 2019 crop, consisting of about 2,100 hemp plants, went in much faster — just four days — and with less effort.

“This year was so easy,” Wilder said.

Hammar, 46, who grew up in Halfway, said he and Wilder initially planned to raise their crop there, 12 miles east of Richland, where they live and raise organic food.