

HEMP

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Wilder, who has an acupuncture business in Halfway, said she grew up on organic farms, so the idea of starting a hemp farm “wasn’t like something totally out of the blue.”

But when the couple were unable to make a deal for land near their home they scrambled and, at very nearly the last minute before planting their initial hemp crop in 2018, they found 10 acres for sale in the Eagle Valley.

The site, which had been a hay field, was attractive not only because the Eagle Valley’s growing season is considerably longer than in the Pine Valley, but also because the 10-acre plot has a much more reliable supply of irrigation water, Hammar said.

Karuna Hemp Farm grew hemp on 2 acres both in 2018 and this year. They grow all their plants from seed rather than buying seedlings, as some growers do.

Hammar, who previously worked for Eagle Creek Orchards near Richland for about a decade

and also worked for a producer of heirloom seeds, said the crop was grown on a different part of the field this year. Although hemp can be grown on the same plot year after year, he said he prefers to rotate the crop annually, growing alfalfa on the rest of the acreage.

The alfalfa adds nitrogen to the soil naturally, without the need for chemical fertilizer, Wilder said.

Indeed the couple uses no chemicals on the hemp farm.

This is the first year hemp farms could be certified as organic, Hammar said, and he and Wilder are pursuing that designation.

He said he hopes that designation will yield a premium price for their crop, as with many other varieties of organic produce.

“We also are trying to have a niche here,” Wilder said.

As is the case with the vast majority of the acres in the U.S. that have been converted to growing hemp over the past few years — from 78,000 acres nationwide in 2018 to 230,000 acres this year, according to the Vote Hemp group — Karuna Hemp Farm’s



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A 300-square-foot greenhouse near Richland is one of three drying sites for the industrial hemp crop from Karuna Hemp Farm.

production is sold to an extracting company that produces cannibidiol, better known as CBD oil.

The product, which like hemp plants does not have the effects of marijuana, is touted for a variety of health benefits, including pain relief and treatment of depression and anxiety.

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Above, Hans Hammar feeds stalks of industrial hemp through a shucking machine built by Marvin Brisk of Halfway. The shucker separates flowers from stalks. At left, Rene Torres-Garcia heads to the shucker with another load to be stripped of flowers.