

# Oregon grower sees opportunity in hemp

By GAIL OBERST  
For the Capital Press

SALEM — More than 100 farmers in Oregon are expected to grow or process one of the Northwest's newest cash crops next year, and it's not marijuana.

About 1,300 acres of industrial hemp are planned this year, according to Lindsay B. Eng, director of Oregon Department of Agriculture's hemp certification program. Thirteen growers signed up for licenses in 2015, the program's first year.

Hemp is a variety of *Cannabis sativa*, but shares none of the psychotropic characteristics of Oregon's newly legalized marijuana. Hemp has long been used as animal bedding, fiber for clothing, and oils for foods, remedies and lotions. It

won't get you high, but even so, hemp has long been lumped with marijuana, requiring complicated federal approval and licensing to grow it. Hemp growers have lobbied to distance the crop from marijuana.

Jerry Norton of Salem, now in his third year as a hemp seed grower and processor, said the new industry has gotten a recent boost from hemp oil's rise in popularity. He recently attended a cannabis conference where hemp was the new star.

"CBD is all they talked about. For health benefits, it's the flavor of the month," said Norton. CBD is cannabidiol, the main ingredient in hemp oil. Claims that hemp oil can improve mood, sleep, appetite, hormone regulation and immune response and relieve pain have prompted producers to include it in products ranging from soap to craft beer, available at your corner grocery store. Demand is rising but U.S. growers are still scarce. Norton is among those who hope to change that.

Industrial hemp does have trace amounts of THC, tetrahydrocannabinol, the substance that produces the "high" in marijuana. But industrial hemp plants for public consumption



Courtesy of Jerry Norton

At a farm in the mid-Willamette Valley, Jerry Norton, far right, is growing hemp with help from supporters. From left are Courtney Moran, a Salem attorney; Rep. Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass; and his chief of staff, Michelle Binker.

by law must contain .3 percent or less THC. Marijuana's THC content can range from 6 percent to 25 percent THC.

The surge in demand for hemp products is a boon for growers, Norton said. With one of the few plant and seed processing cooperatives in the area, his Salem company, American Hemp Seed Genetics, is reaching out to attract more growers. Norton and his company have grown more than 100 acres of hemp for seed, scattered around the mid-Willamette Valley.

The crop is fast-growing and lucrative, Norton said. In

90 days, hemp grows to 6 or 7 feet in the Willamette Valley's clay soils. Almost any crop that needs a rotation can be rotated with hemp, Eng said.

But although the crop promises to be lucrative, challenges remain for this newcomer. Money is foremost. Equipment specific to hemp harvesting, seed research, licenses and certification is expensive and hard to find, Norton said. Eng suggested that current grass seed and grain farmers may have a leg up if they own combines and related equipment.

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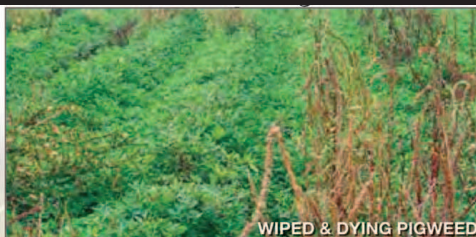
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