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# Opinion

## Editorial Board

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## OUR VIEW

# Federal law makes hemp a risky crop

Over the last several weeks we've been following the progress of Washington state's nascent hemp industry. The state recently licensed its first growers, and a crop has been planted.

Hemp and marijuana, both cannabis plants with decidedly different properties and followings, are legally joined at the hip. States that have moved to legitimize pot have also moved to allow commercial hemp production.

We've never been bullish on hemp.

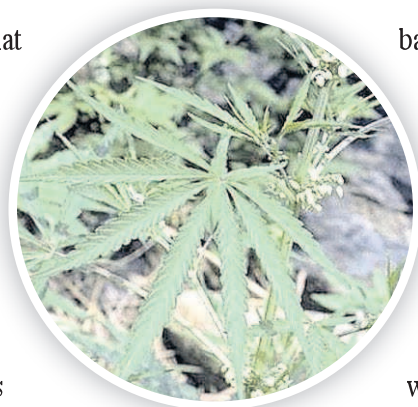
It's not that we don't appreciate its potential. After all, you can go into most any store and see something made out of hemp, hemp oil or hemp seed. Consumers are enthusiastic, and the crop has gotten ample positive press.

And farmers in the Northwest who are planting hemp are finding a ready market. We have no moral objection to hemp.

Hemp is to marijuana what a poppyseed muffin is to heroin. Hemp contains very low amounts of THC, the chemical that produces the high in marijuana. While it is possible to boost the THC in hemp, we've read nothing that suggests this is a real problem.

That it remains illegal under federal law is our only problem with hemp. It's a pretty big problem.

Despite state laws that "legalize" marijuana and hemp, cannabis of all stripes remains illegal under the federal controlled substances act. That means there are problems with depositing the profits from hemp into federally regulated



banks. There are no federal production loans for hemp. Using water from federal projects to grow it could also be problematic.

As long as states regulate hemp, it appears the Department of Justice will turn a blind eye to its cultivation. It's covered under the "Cole memo," the policy adopted by the Obama administration in 2013 to suspend most cannabis enforcement if states that legalize the stuff agree to strict regulatory measures.

But this legal cover is provisional at best. The Cole memo lacks any force of law, and can be set aside in favor of the statute at any time.

The current administration has not made a definitive pronouncement, but there were indications just last week that a change is possible concerning marijuana.

Given the mercurial nature of all things Trump, we wouldn't put a bet on a crop that is only viable as long as the administration decides not to enforce the law.

There are efforts being pressed by members of the congressional delegations of states that have legalized recreational and medical marijuana to change the law and decriminalize cannabis. We are having trouble embracing legal marijuana. But we don't see any reason why hemp should be classified as a controlled substance.

Until there's a change in federal law, hemp remains a risky bet. The law should be changed.

## OUR VIEW



Members of the Shasta Wolfpack congregate in Northern California.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Here we go again. Since 1995 we at the Capital Press have been following the reintroduction of gray wolves in the West, starting with wildlife managers depositing 66 wolves from Canada in Yellowstone National Park and Idaho.

From the start, the wolves have thrived. Wildlife management officials were surprised at how quickly a few dozen wolves multiplied into hundreds. Not only that, they spread in all directions, showing up in Oregon, Washington state, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming and Utah.

Most recently, wolves have taken up residence in California. This was to be expected. Anyone who has witnessed their proliferation across the region knew it was just a matter of time before the predators found a home in sunny California.

Wildlife managers now have decades of experience managing the apex predators, and dealing with the problems they create for ranchers. They know wolves that become accustomed to killing cattle or sheep need to be eliminated from the wolfpack as soon as possible. They know that some wolfpacks will leave livestock alone — provided plenty of other food is available — but others will be a problem.

Witness the Profanity Peak wolfpack in Washington state. Wildlife managers killed seven members of the pack last year only to find that a former member may again be attacking calves this year as part of a new wolfpack.

Managers in Oregon and Washington have struggled to come up with a plan to keep wolves under control. Washington even spent about \$800,000 on a mediator to get various stakeholders — ranchers and environmentalists — together to

talk about the problems wolves have created.

All of which should have been instructive for the folks at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. They took part in a recent a workshop for Northern California ranchers who face the prospect of losing livestock to their hungry new neighbors.

An unfortunate exchange occurred at that meeting, when CDFW wildlife program manager Karen Kovacs told ranchers they have to trust the department.

"Well, you don't trust us," was the response from some ranchers.

The department's managers will soon find out that trust has to be earned. To withhold information from ranchers — whose livelihoods are at stake — makes no sense and only creates more problems.

CDFW sees itself as being in the middle of the wolf issue. Maybe. A more apt description is that ranchers are in the middle, trying to keep wolves from attacking their livestock.

Wildlife managers in Oregon and Idaho have learned to work with ranchers. Washington managers were a little slow on the uptake, but seem to be doing better at that.

California managers would do well to avoid the mistakes their colleagues made in those other states. They need to pick up the phone and ask them what they have learned the hard way.

They will find out that wolves are robust, smart and need no help from them. Wolves such as OR-7 trotted more than 600 miles from northeastern Oregon into Northern California and back into Oregon and found a mate, and he did it on his own.

There's nothing a wildlife manager can do for wolves.

Ranchers and their livestock, on the other hand, need all of the protection they can get.

## READER'S VIEW

### GE developers should be held accountable

I am a farmer in Malheur County, Ore., where I grow seed crops (including non-GE alfalfa), vegetables, and Roundup Ready field corn.

I am not opposed to genetically engineered crops, but as a farmer of some non-GE varieties and after my experience with GE contamination in my alfalfa seed production and with the GE creeping bentgrass escape, I am a supporter of making the right people accountable if crops are damaged. That is why I support HB 2739.

As the chairman of the Malheur County Weed Board, I've had a front row seat to the damage caused by Roundup Ready GE bentgrass, which spreads easily on the wind and through water, infesting irrigation ditches and cross-pollinating with wild relatives.

Because USDA let Scotts and Monsanto off the hook for cleaning up their mess in 2015, the burden is now on farmers and landowners to deal with this infestation. And that's not cheap: Before 2015, Scotts was spending \$250-350k a year to find and treat GE bentgrass.

I'm concerned for my crops, as the value would plummet if I am contaminated with GE traits. If my crop, or say a grass seed crop in the Grass Seed Capital of the World, is damaged, isn't it fair that the company who made that GE trait pay compensation?

The opponents of HB 2739 say the sky will fall if HB 2739 is passed, with outlandish predictions like the end to all sales of GE seeds in Oregon or all innovation of new varieties. That is ridiculous — there is no way this bill would stop the sales or production of Roundup Ready crop varieties, they are just too lucrative for the companies making and selling them.

Why would groups like the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregonians for Food and Shelter, and even OSU say such things? The answer is clear when you look at who finances these organizations: They all get funding from Monsanto and/or other Big Ag chemical companies. So that is who they represent, not farmers like me.

Jeffery Erstrom  
Vale, Ore.

### Cooperation key to prosperity at all levels

As an organic grower, reports of Azure Farms' weed problems impacting their neighbors are a bit embarrassing. It need not have happened, as there are many tools available to organic growers to control weeds. Most of the organic farms I visit are as clean as their neighbors' chemically treated fields.

In a culture that glorifies the individual, this incident highlights the importance of considering the community's needs as much as one's own wishes. Land ownership does not mean that one can do whatever one pleases with the property. An employee once criticized me for burning my garbage, noting that I was simply passing it on to my neighbors. Similarly, before field burning was stopped, I sometimes lost cauliflower crops to ash falling from the

sky and leaving black smudges on the white heads. Now we find that our carbon emissions into the atmospheric commons are causing rising sea levels that will push millions of farmers in Bangladesh, Vietnam and other coastal communities off their land, resulting in lost livelihoods and a reduced food supply.

Human prosperity has long been dependent on our ability to cooperate, whether it is in the form of neighbors helping to bring in the harvest or engineers working together to make a better combine. When we allow our waste, be it weed seeds, chemicals, or carbon dioxide, to move beyond the borders of our property, that cooperation and prosperity are placed at risk.

Jeff Falen  
Lebanon, Ore.

### Weeds, pesticides and finger-wagging

Capital Press did a fair amount of finger-wagging at Azure Farms, the organic farm accused of spreading weed seeds (Capital Press, 5/26/17, "Organic weed battle could have been avoided"). But what about the pesticides that the conventional farmers are spreading? According to Andre Leu in his book "The Myths of Safe Pesticides," there is no such thing as a safe pesticide.

Where is the "Capital Press" finger-wagging about the pesticides of conventional farmers harming the health and contaminating the drinking water of the citizens? These chemical farmers spread their agricultural poisons on hundreds of thou-

sands of acres via airplanes and ground sprayers. Contrary to chemical company PR, these pesticides leave residues on food crops and in drinking water and do not break down into harmless substances.

Currently more than 700 cancer suits have been filed nationwide against the pesticide producer Monsanto. Robert F. Kennedy Jr, co-counsel for the plaintiffs in the suits, expects that number to rise to 3,000 soon. See "The Organic and Non-GMO Report," 4/2017, page 22. Pesticides from chemical farmers would seem to be a lot more dangerous than an organic farm's weed seed spreading.

Patricia Michl  
Lake Tapps, Wash.

## Letters policy

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**Letters policy:** Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and

a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

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