



George Plaven/Capital Press File

Field workers pick hemp flowers at Hemptown USA's Oregon farm in Central Point in late September, 2019.

## Economic sectors talk hemp's potential at virtual symposium

By GEORGE PLAGEN  
Capital Press

Hemp advocates envision the versatile crop will play a prominent role in the U.S. economy in 30 years, used regularly in the production of everyday products including food, fiber, fuel, pharmaceuticals and building materials.

But getting to that point is not so simple.

Lawmakers must adopt policies to ease the regulatory burden on farmers and processors. Scientists must conduct the research and development needed to pioneer new technologies. Breeders must continue studying hemp genetics that best serve such wide-ranging markets.

That was the underlying theme of the first National Hemp Symposium — looking ahead to 2050, and finding the roadmap for a thriving industry.

More than 20 speakers gave presentations during the two-day virtual event, hosted by Oregon State University's Global Hemp Innovation Center and sanctioned by the National Academy of Sciences Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Jay Noller, director and lead researcher at the center, said the program's focus is advancing hemp so that it is embraced by all business sectors.

"It's all the expected potentials for this crop," Noller said. "How can it get there, and what can be done?"

According to one industry estimate, hemp contributed at least \$4 billion to the economy across the U.S. in 2020 and could contribute nearly \$16 billion by 2025.

Part of that growth could come from companies like 3M, a multinational conglomerate that produces more than 60,000 products.

Don Davidson, global new product marketing manager for 3M, said customers across the board are asking for more sustainable and zero-land-fill solutions, which hemp could offer. He speculated that hemp could be a key ingredient in new industrial-strength adhesives, tapes and even fabrics to

make N95 masks amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Certainly, there are a lot of areas we are looking at," Davidson said. "We know the future is coming at us very fast now. I'm excited to see how hemp can be part of some of those next-generation solutions."

John Plaza, CEO of SkyNRG Americas, a company focused on producing sustainable aviation fuel, is also looking at hemp as a possible feedstock for both biomass and oilseed.

Plaza got his start producing biofuel in Washington state, importing canola oil from Canada to use at a refinery in Grays Harbor. That led him to consider other alternative feedstocks, and specifically hemp.

Under the Paris Climate Agreement, Plaza said the U.S. will need to produce 32 billion gallons per year of low-carbon biofuel by 2030 to meet its projected consumption. Current ethanol capacity is roughly 16 billion gallons per year, and biodiesel is roughly 3.5 billion gallons, allowing for potential growth for hemp-based fuels.

But Plaza added that feedstock would likely need to come from waste streams to make economic sense.

"Fuels have to be the last item in line for monetization of a crop," he said. "We've seen that time and time again."

Elsewhere in the transportation sector, Gregg Baumbaugh, CEO of FlexForm Technologies, said the company is interested in adding natural hemp fiber to its repertoire, making lightweight panels used in the interiors of cars, trucks and airplanes.

For that to happen, Baumbaugh said it must pass rigorous auto manufacturer standards and testing for weight, density, moisture content and, critically, mold and mildew.

"When we buy fibers now, we have specifications that must be met," Baumbaugh said. "Our material has to be very, very clean, so that when they mold it and put the veneer on there, it is a very smooth surface. ... What's important to them is cost and quality."

## Quarantine lifted at Oregon mink farm

Group petitions state officials to prohibit mink

By GEORGE PLAGEN  
Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Agriculture has lifted its quarantine on a mink farm where animals previously tested positive for COVID-19.

The farm, which has not been identified for privacy reasons, was initially placed under quarantine on Nov. 24 after 10 mink tested positive for the virus. A quarantine means no animal products were allowed to leave the facility.

Since then, ODA has followed up with five rounds of additional testing. Samples were sent to the USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory, which confirmed the last two rounds came back virus-free. ODA officially lifted the quarantine on Feb. 11.

Dr. Ryan Scholz, state veterinarian, said getting to this result involved collaboration between state and federal agencies, as well as cooperation from the farmer. He said the virus did not mutate, nor was it



On Feb. 11, the Oregon Department of Agriculture lifted the quarantine on the Oregon mink farm previously affected by COVID-19.

detected in any nearby wildlife.

"This is a best-case scenario, and we are sharing what we have learned with others," Scholz said.

Not everyone agrees.

Environmental groups opposed to fur farms have expressed concerns about the virus spilling into the wild, creating a potential reservoir for future transmission. The Center for Biological Diversity has petitioned the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to add mink to the state's prohibited species list.

A hearing on the petition is scheduled for March 19.

## Bill would expand cropland firefighting options

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Cropland owners in Oregon would be eligible to join rangeland fire protection associations under a bill that seeks to improve their access to equipment and training.

Areas that produce dryland wheat are prone to wildfire — as evidenced by the devastating Substation Fire in Wasco and Sherman counties — but currently cannot be included in RFPAs.

"During harvest time, ripe grain crops are a tinder box. A lightning strike, a spark of any kind, or chaff falling on a hot engine can cause a crop fire," said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, during a recent legislative hearing.

Hansell has introduced legislation that would allow RFPAs to be organized on "land used for cultivating crops" in addition to rangeland and undeveloped areas. Supporters say Senate Bill 590 will enhance firefighting resources in rural communities.

"Wildfire does not adhere to boundaries, it does not stop at fence lines or changes in landownership, or rangeland or cropland," said Amanda Hoey, CEO of the Oregon Wheat Growers League.

By forming or joining an RFPa, farmers could better coordinate with state agencies on firefighting and acquire surplus firefighting equipment from the



Courtesy of Molly Belshe

The Substation Fire burns through standing wheat in Sherman County, Ore. State lawmakers are considering a bill that would allow cropland owners to join rangeland fire protection associations, which can acquire surplus federal equipment and access state training.

federal government, Hoey said.

"Though it may be surplus and at the end of its useful life in the eyes of particular agencies, small groups like RFPAs can still get a lot of use out of some of this equipment," said Michael Kelly, a farmer and volunteer firefighter in Wasco County.

Perhaps more importantly, forming an RFPa would allow cropland owners to establish a closer relationship with the Oregon Department of Forestry and other professional firefighting organizations, he said.

Currently, farmers who volunteer to fight fires are often seen as a liability, he said. "That makes communication and teamwork all but impossible during an actual fire."

Farmers in RFPAs would receive training from the ODF, which would

given them "legitimacy" among professional organizations, according to Kelly.

Aside from training, the agency can help RFPAs apply for grants, make legal filings and pay for liability insurance.

Kelly said farmers in his area have organized into a fire district, but the structure isn't a good fit because they lack employees, tax revenue support or professional equipment. Volunteer farmers fight fires with water tanks attached to pickup trucks and with tillage implements on their tractors.

"We are an RFPa, we just don't reap any of the benefits," he said.

Roger Beyer, a lobbyist for the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, said the financial impacts on the state's Department of Forestry must be considered as part of the discussion about SB 590.

## Two ousted by conservation commission appeal to high court

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Two Thurston County farmers petitioned the Washington Supreme Court on Tuesday, claiming the State Conservation Commission should pay for taking a shortcut to remove them as conservation district supervisors.

Eric Johnson and Richard Mankamyer allege the Court of Appeals Division II erred in denying them penalties and attorney fees, even though the court agreed they should have been tried under more formal proceedings.

Johnson and Mankamyer are asking the Supreme Court to review the lower court's ruling. The conservation commission declined to comment.

The conservation com-

mission in 2019 voted to remove Johnson and Mankamyer from the Thurston Conversation District board after a one-day hearing conducted under the law guiding public meetings.

The appeals court ruled the conservation commission should have granted Johnson and Mankamyer's request for a formal adjudication under the state's Administrative Procedure Act.

Trying Johnson and Mankamyer in a more informal hearing was a misuse and violation of the Open

Public Meetings Act, according to the appeals court.

Nevertheless, the court declined to award Johnson and Mankamyer penalties or attorney fees. The three-judge panel ruled the hearing was fair enough.

In the petition to the Supreme Court, Johnson and Mankamyer's attorney, Shawn Timothy Newman, argues the appeal court's ruling conflicts with prior rulings awarding fees for violating the Open Public Meetings Act.

Johnson and Mankamyer

blamed conflicts with staff members and two other supervisors over conservation district's direction and priorities. The board's fifth supervisor spoke out in support of Johnson and Mankamyer.

The conservation commission, meeting in executive session, decided Johnson and Mankamyer had interfered with district operations and acted inappropriately.

Johnson and Mankamyer, whose terms would have expired by now, are not seeking a return to the board.



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