

Hemp

Grower sees future of hemp in flowers

By **CRAIG REED**
For the Capital Press

SUTHERLIN, Ore. — Geoff Bale is continually trying to read the hemp market. After the hemp rush of the past couple of years came to a halt, Bale decided to focus on marketing the hemp flower and to ease up on the CBD oil market.

“It seems like the flower is where the market is headed,” said the 36-year-old who founded Umpqua Valley Hemp in 2018. “There’s so much biomass, it brought the oil price down significantly in the past two years. There are less extractors available now so if you don’t have your own extractor facility, it’s hard to make a profit.”

“I’ve learned a lot the last two years,” added Bale, who has a botany degree from

Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif. “We’re just trying to stay ahead of other people in the industry ... anticipating the direction the industry is headed.”

Umpqua Valley Hemp is a partnership of Bale, his wife, Maria, and his parents, Mary and Barry Bale. Geoff and Maria were vegetable and medical marijuana farmers in the Grass Valley, Calif., area before becoming intrigued by the potential of hemp. They purchased bottom land with water rights alongside Calapooya Creek west of Sutherlin. The property is near where Maria, an Oakland, Ore., High School graduate, grew up.

Four acres of hemp were planted in 2018 and after it produced a profitable crop, the couple sold their California property and moved



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Geoff Bale, co-owner of Umpqua Valley Hemp, is focusing his operation on the hemp flower. His business is selling trimmed flowers and is working on establishing an online store to sell several other hemp products.

north permanently.

In 2019, 50 acres were planted to hemp. After that harvest was impacted by rain, Geoff Bale admitted

that “we planted a little too much and it was a little too fast of growth.”

“We were constantly behind and couldn’t keep up

even with a crew of 40,” he said.

So in 2020, only 30 acres were planted. The farm is not certified organic, but Bale said organic practices are used. To deal with a grasshopper problem, chickens were released into the hemp field and deer eating the hemp plants, hazing permits were obtained from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“We decided to concentrate on quality rather than mass production,” Bale explained. “We reduced our harvest crew to 15 and learned to be more efficient with our process. We’re appealing to the flower market rather than the biomass market and extraction for oil.”

Bale said Umpqua Valley

hemp is now selling trimmed flowers by the pound all over the world to individuals, brokers and smoke shops.

The business planned to open its own online store in April or May.

Bale explained the hemp products offered will be 13 varieties of flowers, tinctures, salves, CBD gummies, pre-rolled hemp joints and terpenes. Any surplus biomass will be shipped to a lab in Eugene, Ore., where CBD oil will be extracted, giving Umpqua Valley Hemp one more product to offer through its online store.

“We’re trying to get out of the wholesale box, work on our own brand and our own products,” Bale said. “I believe in the long run if you play your cards right you can be profitable in this industry.”

Unique location produces high quality

By **BRENNIA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

RICKREALL, Ore. — Pacific Hills Farms’ unique location at the head of Oregon’s Van Duzer Corridor captures cool breezes from the Pacific Ocean as they make their way into the Willamette Valley, affording them several distinct advantages.

“We don’t use plastic mulch and our site is incredibly windy, great for providing the plants with protection from powdery mildew, bud rot and mold, allowing us to farm our hemp entirely spray-free,” Taylor Pfaff, owner and CEO of Pacific Hills, said. “Our pest control for insects and disease is entirely natural, the only additional inputs being nutrients via irrigation.”

“This and the absence of plastic mulch means that our fields can be farmed and rotated easily without any adverse long-term effects on our land or soil, which is highly important since hemp is a bio accumulator and will absorb any inputs directly from the soil.”

Pfaff began his journey in 2019 by carving out 40 acres of his family’s vineyard, Left Coast Estate, for hemp production.

“My family has a viticultural background and I believed that we could apply similar principles to farming hemp: A focus on sense of place, quality growing practices and vertical integration from the ground to the end-consumer products,” Pfaff said.

The operation uses about half of its 40,000 square feet of drying space for its own needs, offering the remainder to other farmers. Hemp is slowly air-dried and cured for quality and terpene preservation. Terpenes are found in essential oils of plants.

“With high quality net-



Pacific Hills Farms

Last year’s hemp harvest in full swing at Pacific Hills Farms.



Pacific Hills Farms

Pacific Hills Farms owner Taylor Pfaff takes samples of last year’s hemp crop.

ting suspended from the truss arches, accommodations can be made for upward of 20 acres of smokable flower to hang dry and cure properly,” Pfaff said.

Their laboratory in Inde-

pendence, Ore., is entirely focused on extraction and the creation of Pacific Hills branded products that include balms, muscle rub and facial serum shipped directly to the customer.



Pacific Hills Farms

Taylor Pfaff, left, and Caleb Hilton of Pacific Hills Farms inspect a freshly harvested crop.

“Unfortunately, CBD is still relatively loosely regulated and it’s difficult for consumers to know what is actually in the products they’ve purchased,” Pfaff said. “A range of studies demonstrates a wide variance of what is in CBD products versus what the label says.”

Pacific Hills works closely with Oregon CBD in Monmouth, a federally legal cannabis research and development company. It provides farmers with scientific knowledge and works to put its best findings into their hands in the form of non-GMO and certified organic hemp seeds for production purposes.

“They are one of the premier pioneers in the industry and have some incredible genetics created specifically for our local climate,” Pfaff said. “Very few producers are able to show a transparent block chain of the product’s life from seed to end product.”

He said his wine background will help him develop his hemp business.

“We hope to continue to evolve this approach in a similar manner to the wine industry and develop a reputation for our products that is tied to our unique growing site in the Willamette Valley,” Pfaff said. “I believe that the mantra ‘You need a great crop to produce great products’ applies equally to the hemp industry.”



Left to right, co-founder Jonathan Cook, farm manager Gretl Gauthier and co-founder Max Sassenfeld are a part of Resonance Farm in Eugene, Ore.

Farm produces hemp products from field to retail

By **ALIYA HALL**
For the Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Inspired by the burgeoning CBD industry, Jonathan Cook began to look into the potentials of hemp. In 2016, after months of research, Cook partnered with Max Sassenfeld to found Resonance Farm.

“(We) concluded that the idea to bring a hemp product to market could be economically viable if (we) grew the hemp, extracted it and formulated a retail ready CBD-rich oil,” Cook said.

Resonance Farm now produces cannabidiol (CBD) oil and cannabigerol (CBG) oil using organic farming practices.

Sassenfeld owned and operated Tani Creek Farm, a certified organic farm on Bainbridge Island, Wash., for 10 years. His focus was producing vegetables for farmers markets.

Cook has been part of Eugene’s food and restaurant community since 2001 and is a working CSA member at Camas Swale Farm in nearby Coburg.

Along with the better known CBD, Resonance Farm produces CBG. Unlike CBD, CBG reacts with the cannabinoid receptors of the brain while being non-psychoactive.

The same equipment is used for both CBD and CBG. They use a traditional method of hang drying and slow cure their hemp, “which is more labor intensive, but yields a superior quality product,” Cook said.

No petrochemicals are used in the production of the oil. It’s all extracted with carbon dioxide, which is the cleanest method for botanical extractions.

The biggest challenge was the learning curve of pioneering an industry that hadn’t existed for decades, Cook said.

In 2017, the supply chain for hemp and CBD products was virtually nonexistent.

“We had to create a network of clients,” he said.

In 2017-2018 they grew more hemp than they could process and had to sell their biomass to other processors for around \$50 a pound.

In 2019, prices dropped due to an influx of large scale hemp producers creating more supply than demand.

“We grew less volume and switched focus to building our own brand,” Cook said.

“In 2021 the supply chain has matured and there is more access to raw materials, creating more competition,” he said.

The other challenge was the logistics of growing and harvesting hemp in Oregon’s variable weather.

“We lost a huge percentage of our 2019 harvest due to heavy rains in mid-September,” said Gretl Gauthier, the farm manager.

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 that March was another challenge, Gauthier said they didn’t have any plants in the ground at the time. This allowed them to take the time to implement safe practices at the farm and at their facility.

Despite the uncertainty created by COVID, “internet and Lane County Farmers Market sales remained steady,” Cook said.

This year, their focus is investigating several new avenues to bring hemp products to the retail market.

“Our plan is to continue to strengthen and maintain our integrity as a reputable field-to-shelf company,” he said.

While it’s rewarding to create jobs and contribute to the community, Cook said the most rewarding aspect of what they do is “creating products that positively impact people’s lives.”

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