

What the hemp is going on?

BY RICHARD ROSEBERG, PHD

The relationship between humans and the *Cannabis sativa* plant is long and complex, and the current situation in Oregon and other states continues to evolve quickly. Oregon has been ahead of most other states in its efforts to legalize cannabis for medicinal and recreational purposes, but Oregon State University (OSU) has been unable to conduct research or provide public outreach due to the crop's illegality in all forms under federal law until recently.

The 2018 federal Farm Bill decriminalized industrial hemp production, but OSU Research and Extension efforts are limited until the US Department of Agriculture provides regulatory guidelines—which may take up to a year. Many people have asked what OSU will be doing to support this segment of agriculture in the meantime, especially here in southern Oregon, including the Applegate Valley, where growing conditions are nearly ideal for this species.

Within the limits of the new Farm Bill, OSU is now in the process of developing and conducting a number of research and educational outreach efforts, and the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center (SOREC) is keenly involved in these developments. Despite the excitement around this crop, and despite OSU's desire to be as supportive as possible to our state's agricultural industry and communities, the current status of federal laws and regulations affect what we can legally say and do. We've listed below the five primary types of cannabis growers. Refer to each group below to see how OSU-SOREC may interact with the growers in each category.

1. Industrial hemp for fiber and seed. Industrial hemp is federally defined as *Cannabis sativa* that has *less than* 0.3 percent by weight of the delta-9 THC compound (the compound that causes the psychoactive "high").

OSU will be growing and studying industrial hemp at research stations like SOREC in 2019. OSU faculty will be able to collect and answer questions related to industrial hemp only if a farmer confirms that he or she has registered with the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) as a hemp grower.

2. Hemp for other purposes. Some farmers are growing hemp (low THC) in order to extract other cannabinoids or terpenes. The legality of this approach is still a gray area in federal law. Because production and extraction of such compounds was not included as a protected aspect in the 2018 Farm Bill, OSU will not be answering questions related to this type of crop but will instead refer farmers to the ODA.

3 and 4. Marijuana licensed for medicinal or recreational use. Marijuana is federally defined as *Cannabis sativa* that has *more than* 0.3 percent by weight of the delta-9 THC compound. OSU will not answer questions or advise medical or recreational marijuana growers. OSU will refer all questions to the Oregon Health Authority (medical) or the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (recreational).

5. Unlicensed hemp or marijuana. OSU will not answer questions or advise unlicensed hemp or marijuana growers. OSU will refer all questions or complaints about such growers to local law enforcement.



A Rogue Valley field with a hemp crop near harvest time in the fall of 2018.
Photo: Richard Roseberg.

For 2019, SOREC is cooperating on a statewide agronomy field trial focusing exclusively on industrial hemp. To avoid any possible conflict with neighboring growers, we plan to destroy our crop at an immature stage, before male flowers and pollen develop. We are also cooperating with others across the state in collecting and responding to questions we can answer, as well as publishing current and new information on hemp as it becomes available.

We hope that future rule changes and legislation will allow us to work more fully on more aspects of this crop species, but for now we will be limited strictly to what is allowed under federal law, which means we will not be consulting or testing any aspects of post-harvest extract processing, purification or product formulation.



Female hemp flower after harvest and drying.
Photo: Richard Roseberg.

Regardless of what type of crop a person is growing, we will continue to provide general farm advice and identification services, such as weed and insect identification, or answer generic questions about irrigation water use, generic pesticide use rules, etc.

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