

USDA should rework its hemp testing rules

Farmers have been poring over the details of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's interim rules governing the production of hemp. They haven't liked a lot of what they see.

If nothing else, the rules have ended a lot of people's dreams of quick, big money in the hemp business.

It's not all bad news. Now that hemp is legal, growers can access USDA programs such as crop insurance, farm loans and conservation programs. Farmers can also use water from federal irrigation projects to grow the crop.

But the rub comes in rules designed to keep legal hemp from becoming an illegal source of delta-9 THC, the psychoactive substance found in cannabis.

And here you may require a brief tutorial in cannabis chemistry. Both marijuana and hemp contain various compounds — delta 9 THC, THCA, CBD, CBDA and CBG to name a few. Several of these compounds have commercial purposes, some more legal than others.

Marijuana remains illegal under federal law, but legal in some states for medicinal and recreational purposes. Growers select varieties with high delta-9 THC levels. The more THC, the bigger the buzz, the more valuable the crop.

Industrial hemp, on the other hand, has relatively low levels of delta-9 THC. It is most often grown to extract CBD oil, which is sold for its medicinal value.

Under USDA rules, legal hemp becomes illegal marijuana when it contains more than 0.3% THC. How that level is measured is the detail that can make or break an otherwise legal hemp crop.

Over the last few years, state ag departments regulating the crop have measured only delta-9 THC. But the USDA's new rules would measure "total THC," taking into account THCA — which converts into delta-9 THC when heated.

Under that standard some cannabis that qualified as hemp in previous years would exceed the threshold and need to be destroyed.

The USDA also wants the plants tested within 15 days of harvest. That's a pretty tight window given the unpredictability of fall weather in the Pacific Northwest and the USDA's requirement that testing be performed only at labs approved by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, both Oregon Democrats and longtime hemp advocates, have asked the USDA to adopt less strict testing protocols that would consider only delta-9 THC levels, give farmers a longer window to test plants and allow more labs to do the testing.

"Farmers in Oregon and across the country are on the precipice of an agricultural boom that, with the right regulatory framework, stands to boost rural economies in every corner of the country," they wrote to Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue.

We think they're right in asking for a more favorable testing regime. The chances people will grow hemp for illicit THC seem pretty small given the availability of legal marijuana.

Whether hemp is a boon for rural economies remains to be seen. But farmers don't need the USDA throwing up unnecessary roadblocks.



GUEST COLUMN

Soaring into space

The machine whipped me up and down, around and around.

I'm in training for a big adventure.

My "Boarding Pass" reads: "NASA National Aeronautics and Space Administration Boarding Pass Mars 2020 Jean A. Moultrie Launch Site: Cape Canaveral, Air Force Station Florida, Earth Arrival Site: Jezero Crater, Mars Rocket: Atlas V-541 Scheduled Departure: July 2020

Award Points Earned: 313,586,649 mi"

"Let me off this contraption," I hollered to the equipment operator. "I can't stand anymore."

The operator stopped the ride, helped me unbuckle my belt and climb off the wooden horse.

"Listen, lady," said the operator. "If you can't handle being on a merry-go-round, stay off the ride."

Unfortunately for me, I seem to have inherited a propensity for motion sickness — not a good attribute for space travel. I've experienced motion sickness on the following: car rides, bus, ferry, canoe, sailing vessel, aircraft, whale-watching boat, playground swing, summersaulting down a grassy slope (as a



Jean Ann Moultrie

kid) and carnival rides.

Fortunately, I travel to space vicariously. My name, etched on a microchip along with a few million other names, will soar into

space toward Mars. I'll watch the news broadcast with a bowl of popcorn. With my training, I won't experience motion sickness at blast-off while perched on a sofa.

Per NASA, the "launch period for Mars opens on July 17, 2020. It will land on Mar's Jezero Crater on February 18, 2021." I'll check periodically for progress reports.

In the meantime, I check on the Mars Curiosity Rover and the latest selfies taken while doing research.

Next, I turn my attention to the International Space Station and the astronaut broadcasts where they share experiences in space. A NASA chart shows when and how to locate the space station, the "third brightest object" in the sky near sunset or sunrise. For my location, I entered the area of John Day, Oregon, in the "Spot the Station" sign in.

During the time I searched,

the Space Station was noted to be visible without telescope at Canyon City, Prairie City and the John Day Fossil Beds. On another day or when visiting someone, I enter the location and search for when and where the space station is visible.

To soar through space seems adventurous.

I prefer staying on planet earth and Grant County where the county road caution sign lists "Wildlife for 40 miles."

Discovered ways to "soar": Vicariously through the study of space travel,

Photographing birds in flight, Helping a child read and learn about space.

The deadline is ended for submitting a name for this Mars exploration.

I signed up for the notification when the list opens for the next Mars mission.

For great winter and summer activities learning about NASA research, including past and future space missions with sections for students, educators and the general public, visit nasa.gov.

The author is a freelance writer in Grant County. She's requesting books about space and a telescope from Santa, if possible. Or bird feeders and bird-watching binoculars.



WHERE TO WRITE

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rotate the states

To the Editor:

Every four years since 1972, Iowa and New Hampshire in tandem have repeatedly been the first two states to vote in the American presidential primary process. Isn't it time for the other 48 states to take their turns at being one of the first two states to vote?

We should reform the presidential primary process in time for 2024 by instituting a rotational centennial schedule whereby every state will finally have the opportunity to be one of the first two states to vote.

Rotating the states would bring a much needed, overdue element of fairness to our primary system by giving each state (no matter how sparsely

populated) a period of political relevance.

Also, moving Iowa and New Hampshire out of their unwarranted privileged political positions at the front of the line would help make the process more demographically representative of the nation at large.

Jake Pickering
Eureka, California

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