

Hemp is a beautiful plant, and a gift from the earth. --Alex White Plume

What is Industrial Hemp?

Hemp is the standard fiber of the world. It has great tensile strength and durability. It is used to produce more than 5,000 textile products ranging from rope, to fine laces, and the woody "hurds" remaining after the fiber has been removed, contain more than 77% cellulose, and can be used to produce more than 25,000 products ranging from dynamite to cellophane. -- "The New Billion Dollar Crop" from Popular Mechanics, 1938

Industrial hemp is a resilient plant that prospers even in harsh conditions. A hemp crop poses no threat to the health of the land because it grows abundantly and quickly without chemical fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides. The DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) spends \$495 million a year to destroy pockets of wild hemp that grow across the United States.

The scientific classification of the industrial hemp plant is *cannabis sativa*. Marijuana also shares this classification. However, industrial hemp contains less than 1% THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana (marijuana contains 5% and higher THC). In other words, hemp cannot be used to get high. Regardless of this important distinction, the DEA still classifies hemp as an illegal drug, just as it does marijuana.

It is legal to cultivate hemp in 32 countries throughout the world, including Canada, Russia, Hungary, and China. U.S. manufacturers of hemp products must import all of their raw hemp, thereby excluding American farmers from a potential market, while making hemp products more expensive for American consumers.

Why is it illegal to grow hemp?

The simple reason is that the DEA makes no distinction between marijuana and hemp, regardless of hemp's absence of THC. During the 1950's, hemp was lumped in with marijuana and classified as a controlled substance.

The DEA also claims that legalizing hemp would make it more difficult to enforce marijuana prohibition and their "war on drugs." They think that growers could hide a marijuana operation among hemp fields.

There are several problems with this theory:

Hemp is grown close together and is very tall and skinny, while marijuana is grown farther apart in short bushes.

An attempt to grow marijuana within a hemp field would yield a low-THC marijuana crop due to the effects of cross-pollination among the plants.

There is a simple and inexpensive field test available to determine THC levels in the plants; revealing the presence of marijuana in a hemp field.

There is speculation among hemp supporters and academics that the real reason for keeping hemp illegal is that DEA jobs would be jeopardized if agents were not required to track down and eradicate "ditchweed," which is wild hemp left over from the 1940's, a time when hemp cultivation was legal and encouraged.

Another theory is that cotton growers, lumber companies and oil companies have biased legislators against hemp because hemp yields products that would compete with their industries.

It has been widely hypothesized by opponents of hemp that legalization would "send the wrong message to children" and undermine the "war on drugs." More likely, the federal government refuses to admit that they are wrong about hemp, because if they appear fallible, the American people may begin to question other entrenched policies.

What are the arguments in favor of legalizing hemp cultivation?

The plants to the Lakota are called the silent nation.  
--Debra White Plume

Hemp has many uses, provides excellent products, grows well in a variety of conditions, and is environmentally friendly.

#### Fiber/Textiles

Hemp yields excellent fiber for clothing, canvas, cordage, etc.

#### Animal Bedding

Hemp chips provide an absorbent material for stable bedding. It suppresses odors better than straw and breaks down quickly into rich black soil.

#### Fuel

Ethanol and other types of fuels for powering engines and providing energy to homes are derived from hemp. Unlike fossil fuels, hemp is a cheap and truly renewable fuel source.

### Car Doors

Hemp makes strong, lightweight door panels for cars, improving the safety of the vehicle without adding to its weight.

### Beauty

Hemp oil is used in shampoo, soap, lotion, make-up and creams.

### Food/Feed

Hemp foods designed for human consumption are rich in protein, amino acids and fatty acids. Hemp can also provide nutritious feed for animals.

### Plastics

Plastics made from hemp are strong and biodegradable.

### Paper

An acre of hemp, grown in about 120 days, produces more paper pulp than an acre of trees that takes years to grow.

### Housing Materials

Hemp offers an alternative to expensive building materials such as insulation and fiberboard and is used in bricks, roof shingles, insulation, and creating strong foundations for structures.

### Environmental Benefits

The entire hemp plant can be utilized. Hemp reintroduces nourishing nitrogen into the soil and does not require expensive and environmentally unfriendly pesticides and herbicides because it grows so close together that it eliminates other weeds and pests.

### Other Benefits

Hemp can grow without much water in a variety of conditions and climates.

### Is there a market for hemp?

There has been much speculation about the economic viability of a hemp industry and the potential market that exists for hemp products. Hemp possesses enough positive characteristics that a market, if it does not already exist, could burgeon given aggressive marketing techniques.

Hugh Downs of ABC News claims that "hemp could be worth considerably more than \$4 billion a year, if it were legally supplying the 50,000 safe products the proponents claim it can. If hemp could supply the energy needs of the United States, its value would be inestimable."

