

Hemp fields may soon sprout across Canada

Canada's new legislation could provide the nation with an environmentally friendly resource

BY GREG MCFARLANE

Industrial hemp could be a goldmine for Canada, but stringent government regulations may make it difficult for stalks to grow.

Both economically and environmentally, hemp is a sound crop, says Sara Francis of the Canadian Industrial Hemp Council (CIHC) in Halifax.

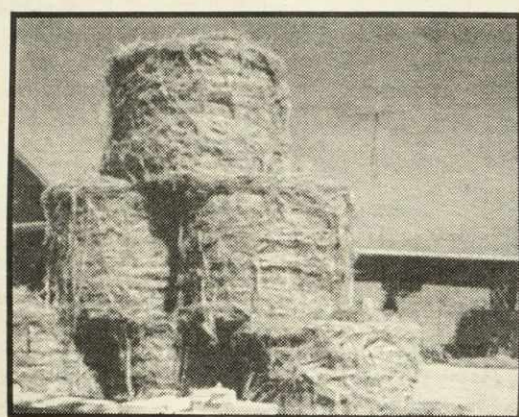
Canada's temperate climate is ideal for hemp farming. While countries at the same latitude as Canada, like China (which exports 80 per cent of the world's hemp) and Hungary, are making profits by growing the plant and exporting hempen products, farmers in our nation may have trouble cashing in on the crop.

The problem, according to Don Wirtshafter of the Ohio Hempery in Guysville, Ohio is that hemp falls under the scope of Health Canada. In 1938, when Canada followed America's lead by outlawing cannabis, lawmakers did not distinguish between the many strains of the plant. The Canadian government banned recreational marijuana, but also prohibited hemp farming.

Since then, hemp farming has slowly become more accepted. Regulations making hemp legal as a commercial crop are set to become law in mid-February. However, as a precaution,

Health Canada is overseeing the industry.

Wirtshafter and his shareholders had intended to expand their hemp products business into Canada, and they even wanted to start farming in our nation,



THE HEMP: Resource of the future?

but decided not to after hearing the nature of the regulations.

"The stake holders are pretty unanimous that Health Canada went too far," said Wirtshafter, who is also a lawyer. "There is evidence that you can regulate hemp so no one will get high. Health Canada makes laws, but they have no idea what they are doing in regulating farmers."

Wirtshafter believes that Health Canada should be removed from the process, and Agriculture Canada should be the governing body, as it is for other crops.

Brian Johnson, whose Victoria-based company, Transglobal Hemp Products, was involved in initiating the new regulations, disagrees.

"I'm glad that Health Canada is involved," Johnson said. "It gives the industry credibility."

Despite Wirtshafter's claims that Agriculture Canada should be the governing body, Johnson appreciates the forthcoming legislation, and feels that, for the time being, farmers should be happy with what they have received.

"Government never says 'good luck, have fun'...they always regulate to a degree. The government took hemp and moved it from [the dangerous drug category] and put it under Health Canada. They compromised."

CIHC's Francis noted that society's overall ignorance regarding the various types of cannabis plants have helped to create tighter laws. Plants with high THC levels, like marijuana, can be used

to rotate crops), whereas it usually takes around 25 years for trees to mature. To further her point, Francis noted that paper can only be recycled so many times. By adding hemp fibres to paper fibres, paper can be recycled many more times over, and be stronger as well.

The evidence is staggering indeed, and provides ample ammunition to

thousands of tonnes of pesticides. Francis also says in her thesis, *Hemp as an alternative source of fibre for Nova Scotia*, that hemp is numerous times more productive than wood for products like paper. One hectare of hemp plants will provide ten tonnes of hempstalk. To produce the same amount in hardwood trees, more than three hectares need to be used. And don't forget that hemp can be grown every year (although it is wise

to rotate crops), whereas it usually takes around 25 years for trees to mature. To further her point, Francis noted that paper can only be recycled so many times. By adding hemp fibres to paper fibres, paper can be recycled many more times over, and be stronger as well.

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Hemp and marijuana

as a psychoactive drug. Inhaling smoke from a plant with a low THC level, like industrial hemp, will merely produce a headache. Yet people confuse the two.

"People are paranoid that it isn't an industrial crop," Francis said. "Parents think that their kids are going to smoke their clothes."

Despite this apparent ignorance, most hemp dealers state that consumers are curious rather than suspicious. Because of the obvious links that hemp has with pot, most hemp shops feel the responsibility to educate weary consumers. Cindy Crawford, who works at P'Lovers in Park Lane, clearly defines the difference for consumers, a step Wirtshafter believes is essential.

"When we are successful at separating hemp from drugs, then no one is complaining," he said.

That's quite a feat in the US, where hemp is about as popular as communism. Wirtshafter, perhaps due to his knowledge of the legal system, has managed to evade the paranoia that grips his country.

"When I started in 1989, I thought we'd really get harassed," he said. "But we haven't made anybody mad yet."

One persistent fear is that growers might hide marijuana plants in a field of hemp stalks. Francis sees this as an unfeasible and risky way to grow the drug.

"[Hemp] is so densely grown, you wouldn't be able to find [the marijuana]," she said.

She also explained that the first batch of pot could be useful for smoking, but not subsequent ones.

"If you have a high THC plant next to a low THC plant, [when the seeds pollinate], they will be of a lower THC level [than the marijuana]," Francis said. "And it would be a risk — farmers know that fields will be heavily inspected."

From the environmental standpoint, hemp is about as good a product as can be found. Not only does it require very little in the way of pesticides and fungicides, it requires no herbicides. Cotton on the other hand requires

environmental groups and pro-industrial hemp lobbyists.

Wirtshafter and Francis both agree that the production of hemp promotes sustainable environmental practices, something the world sorely needs.

"People are waking up and realizing what they are missing," Wirtshafter said. "Petro-chemical dependence is not the right answer."

Wirtshafter is referring to a major problem with the world's environment. Not only does our dependence on petroleum drain the earth of natural resources, but it emits large amounts of pollutants into the air at processing plants. Hemp enthusiasts claim that, by relying more on cannabis as a resource, the pace of environmental decay will slow down.

Francis also claims that hemp will be a strong product for the future, even if the ozone layer is further depleted.

"If the ozone layer is depleted, hemp will thrive," noted Francis. "It can tolerate a lot of [ultraviolet light]. That is why it can be grown in mountains at high altitudes in India."

Hemp advocates believe that it will be a boon to rural economies, where farms are being shut down daily. Wirtshafter notes that many farmers are looking for an answer to their economic worries and, in Canada, hemp may just be it.

"The farmers are desperately looking for alternative crops, and Canada has the right latitudes [for industrial hemp]. What's it competing with?" asked Wirtshafter. "Canada could be the world's leader in hemp production if the bureaucrats would get out of the way."

Hemptech, a US-based research network, states in its pamphlet, *Industrial Hemp: Practical Products — Paper to Fabric to Cosmetics*, that, in an ideal world:

The local farmer grows some hemp, and sells it to a regional processor who offers good paying jobs. The processormarkets the resulting hemptextiles to a local garment factory, where a pair of hemp jeans is made. Those jeans are then resold at a local, family-owned retail store. The net effect of this sequence of events helps the local economy by creating jobs and circulating currency within the community. Thus the wearer of these jeans contributes

to the well-being of his or her bioregion.

This is at best an idealistic version of hemp production, and clearly has its roots in a communitarianist ideology. Realistically, if hemp becomes a popular product, there is nothing stopping big business from jumping on the bandwagon.

Hemptech also notes that Calvin Klein, as well as many other high-end retailers, are already selling upscale hemp merchandise.

Also, most hemp clothing costs considerably more than cotton or synthetic textiles, and that may deter buyers.

Those who sell hemp feel that the

Little hemp shop of horrors

The enigmatic store owner was hiding something

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

There are a new breed of store owners in the province of Nova Scotia and they are a peculiar bunch. Not only do they shy away from publicity, they are surprisingly coy about the uses of some of their products.

What are these budding businesses selling that forces them to hide behind smoke-screens of denial and vague innuendo?

The big hush is over bongs, pipes, rolling papers and other devices for delivering smoke to the lungs.

Following the lead of successful shops in British Columbia and Ontario, a handful of entrepreneurs around Nova Scotia are selling smoking devices with a tongue-in-cheek, see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, outlook.

They are the owners of hemp shops, culture shops and sometimes

higher price is justified. Hemp usually lasts four times longer than cotton, and most dealers will argue that consumers are getting a worthwhile product. Many will also claim that consumers are paying for environmental sustainability, something they can't put a price on.

retailers would most likely be controlled by government officials (similar to liquor commissions across the country) and addiction services similar to Alcoholics Anonymous would have to be available to the public.

The government would be quick in assuming control over the new

Have you ever had any hassles with the law? "No. Knock on wood...but that's because we're selling nothing illegal."

So you don't advocate marijuana use in any way? "No. We run the store as a business, not an activist centre. Some other stores [in other parts of the country] do, but we're just trying to make a buck."

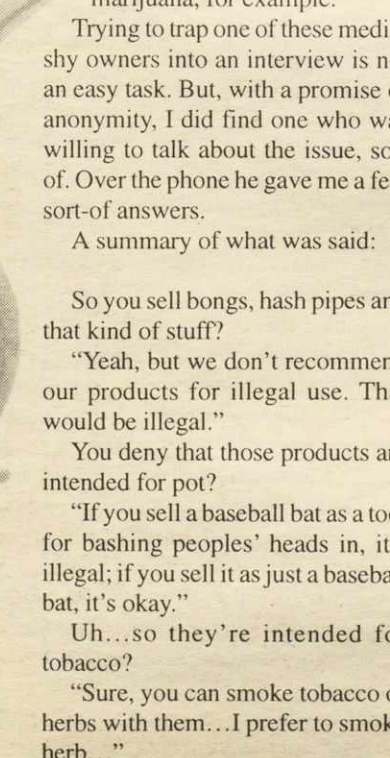
Do you advertise?

"No, we keep quiet. That's why we're still here to serve. We advertise through word of mouth and we have a faithful clientele."

While continuing to deny that there is anything illegal going on in his store, he explained that businesses such as his are a relatively new thing in Nova Scotia. Many of the stores in Ontario and British Columbia — with deeper roots, and pockets — can afford to openly defy the law.

In the meantime, Nova Scotia's smoking paraphernalia industry quietly continues to grow. It appears Nova Scotians are just going to have to get used to bong wielding pot-heads and baseball bat wielding thugs.

Uh...so they're intended for tobacco? "Sure, you can smoke tobacco or herbs with them...I prefer to smoke herb..."



Championing the cause: legalization

Osgoode Hall professor, hemp shop owner boost the pro-pot movement

BY JOHN CULLEN AND BRIANNE JOHNSTON

Decriminalization of marijuana means getting caught with pot would be much like getting busted by the highway patrol for excessive speeding. You would receive a fine and no blemish on your criminal record.

But proponents of full-scale legalization think decriminalization would still fuel a black market economy. Sale, cultivation and distribution of marijuana would not change, leaving the recreational user with the same hassles when getting their

bud.

Legalization, on the other hand, could involve a cross section of our society. If the myths behind cannabis were debunked, farmers, business people, the government and entrepreneurs could all reap the rewards of a new Canadian cash-crop. Legalization would involve implementation of several different services. Regulatory boards would check potency and quality as well as monitoring cultivation,

plant. Current alcohol and tobacco taxes provide substantial revenue for our economy. If marijuana becomes legal, you can guarantee it will be taxed. In fact, an Ottawa researcher, Ken Rubin, recently obtained confidential Health Canada memoranda which revealed bureaucrats in our capitol examining ways to control pot potency. They have also been investigating how to tax its sale and treat its addicts.

One of the reasons behind government officials looking at pot

reform is the burden criminalization puts on our already strained economy. Professor Neil Boyd, a criminologist at Simon Fraser University in BC, says that the cost of prosecuting and punishing marijuana users is anywhere from \$200-million to \$2-billion annually. There are currently 2000 police officers dedicated to busting users, pushers and traffickers of drugs in Canada. By 1995, the number of drug charges had fallen to 40,373 from a mid-80s average of 58,995. Of the more recent arrests, 27,180

were cannabis related including 19,105 for possession.

Looking at these numbers, it is no surprise that one of the fundamental arguments against prohibition is that illegality does not stop the availability or use of the drug.

"Post legalization court and drug enforcement costs would drop by about half. Criminalization has not stopped people from taking," Boyd said.

One of the more interesting cases continued on page 14...

Marijuana: beyond euphoria

BY GINA STACK

question cannabis is addictive and it has long term effects.

"It's a much stronger drug and of course it has a much greater impact. It used to be put in the same category as alcohol, and then in high doses in the same category with acid, now it's put in a category all on its own."

Tobin adds that hydroponics have played a large role in the evolution of the drug.

"Hydro-weed is marijuana that's grown hydroponically which makes it stronger...not only the THC, but the tar and the other chemicals, so you're getting more bang for your buck, I guess."

There are more than 400 drugs in marijuana. Many have not been identified yet, but Tobin says the drug THC is more dangerous than users have been led to believe.

"THC is unlike most of the other chemicals in drugs. If you drink alcohol, alcohol is water soluble, and it leaves the body within 24 to 38 hours. It's the same thing with acid, same thing with

cocaine, but THC is fat soluble, so what it does is it stores itself in fatty cells of the body. The main areas of the body that it stores itself in are the brain, the lungs and the sex organs."

Tobin says that smoking marijuana has long term health effects on all of these areas. These problems are most evident in adolescents' (those aged 11 to 21) mental development.

"One of the impacts of cannabis on the brain is that it effects short term memory. What it does is it wraps itself around the fatty cells in the brain, the nerve endings and it affects memory, it affects cognitive learning (problem solving) and it affects motivation."

"What we see with the adolescents we are working with is kids who don't remember very well, who have difficulty learning and who don't give a damn."

Tobin says that smoking marijuana can be far more harmful than smoking a cigarette.

Cannabis has a tar content that's even continued on page 14...

Hemp notes

COMPILED BY ERIN SPERLING

Hemp and marijuana are the same plant species, *Cannabis sativa* L.

The psychoactive property of Cannabis is delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Recreational varieties of cannabis products have between 3% and 30% THC.

Industrial varieties (hemp) have less than 0.3% THC content.

Hemp yields four times more material in one year than one acre of 20-year-old trees.

A mature crop can be harvested every year.

Little to no pesticides are needed if the hemp crop is rotated annually with other crops, such as grass and barley.

Hemp products include high-quality paper, textiles and building materials.

There is a high protein and oil content in hemp that is suitable for consumption.

According to *Perceptions Magazine on Hemp*, the contaminated soil around Chernobyl is being rehabilitated by growing hemp on it.

Hemp is the oldest cultivated crop known to humans, first used by the Chinese more than 9,000 years ago.

Widespread use of industrial hemp has not been implemented due to its association with recreational marijuana.

What Can You Get In Hemp?

For those who are unaware, hemp was probably one of the most used fibres before it was prohibited in Canada and the United States in the 1930s. Although it is still illegal to grow the plant in the US, Canada is set to make it legal to grow commercial hemp. Although a lot of the following hemp products are imported from other countries, expect to see a more of these in local stores:

clothing, candy (from seeds), granola, rope, yarn, paper, sandals, ties, toques, blankets, notepads, backpacks, attaches, wallets, kisk sacs, shampoos, massage oils, belts, watchbands, coffee, earrings and other jewelry and shoes (the Ohio Hempery used to sell hemp addidas shoes).

In a small book made by Hemptech, a US-based hemp advocacy group, there are some products made from hemp that most people wouldn't even dream of. For example, Henry Ford used a composite made from hemp and sisal cellulose plastic to make automobiles. By mixing hemp with other materials, and by using every single aspect of the plant, the following products can be made:

oil paints, varnishes, solvents, printing inks, fuel, stucco and mortar, brake/clutch linings (vehicles), insulation materials, cement blocks tarps, diapers, abrasive fluids, soap, cosmetics and carpets.

If Murphy Brown can do it, so can Canadians

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

It has been judged unconstitutional to deny a Canadian the right to use marijuana as a medical treatment.

The ruling was made in an Ontario court on December 10, in response to the case of 42-year-old Terry Parker, an epileptic who was charged with cultivation and possession of marijuana in July 1996.

Parker claimed the best way to control his illness was through a combination of prescribed medication and smoking marijuana.

This decision was appealed two days later and is still being fought in the courts, but it does open the door to people in other provinces to challenge the Controlled Drug and Substance Act on the same grounds as Parker.

Many patients claim that using marijuana can decrease pain and anxiety, decrease nausea caused by chemotherapy and other intensive drug treatments and act as an appetite stimulant.

But Dr. Stewart Cameron, Chief of Family Medicine at the QE II Health Sciences Centre, isn't sure that a change in the drug laws will be coming without an increase in medical research on the effects of marijuana on patients.

"One of the problems we face is that the only evidence we have is

anecdotal," said Dr. Cameron. "It may well be effective."

"It hasn't been well researched — partly because it's been demonized as 'Satan's Drug'... It's such a hot potato you won't find anyone to fund [research on it]."

There are currently other cannabinoids available for medical use. Nabilone and Dronabinol are both used to treat nausea and vomiting brought on by cancer treatments. These are not, Dr. Cameron points out, equivalent to medical use of marijuana, but are drugs derived from marijuana.

Wilson Hodder is the director of the AIDS coalition of Nova Scotia, and has been using marijuana along with his AIDS treatment for years, primarily to stimulate appetite and relieve nausea.

"There are [legal] drugs that can do the same thing," Hodder admits, "but these drugs have side effects that are undesirable. This is not to say though, that there are no side effects to marijuana use."

Hodder pointed out that while synthetic forms of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC: the principal psychoactive agent in marijuana) were available, taking the drug orally meant it was much slower to take effect and the effects often lasted much longer than desired.

"One could be stoned for up to continued on page 14..."