

# \$52 million hemp market up for grabs

...cont'd from page one

Canada last year at his farm in Tillsonburg, Ontario.

According to Kime, the ten acres of government approved, low-THC hemp that he grew last summer needed no pesticides or herbicides, and required amounts of fertilizer comparable with most other crops. In a Gazette interview, he said that Canada is ahead of the States in developing hemp as a renewable resource.

Here in Canada, the prestigious Vancouver clothing company, Tilley's Endurables, has already tried hemp cloth from China, and announced last summer that they intend to use cloth made from Canadian hemp in their fashion line-up as soon as it becomes available.

On Canada's east coast, entrepreneur Robert Smith of Halifax has first-hand experience with

## Canada leads U.S. in hemp industry development

the incredible marketing potential of hemp cloth, and he spoke with the Gazette about why hemp is enjoying such immense appeal.

"It is definitely the environmental factor that is the key to hemp's popularity," said Smith, who founded a hempware retailing company called Hempshack over a year ago. "As a substitute for cotton, it does not require pesticides and herbicides that build up in the environment and destroy wildlife."

According to Smith, it is the uses for hemp other than for textiles that appeal most to customers he has spoken with. "If hemp was widely grown and used for making paper, construction materials, or any of the other esti-

mated 50,000 commercial uses for hemp, it would definitely alleviate the destruction of our forests, not to mention eliminate the pollution of our waterways and coastlines by plants that bleach wood pulp."

Smith points to increasing historical awareness about hemp as part of the motivation behind the crop's revival. "If you look at it historically, it has been used since at least 8,000 B.C. Even into this century, it was the main source, around the world, for our ropes, canvas, clothes, textiles — and most products made from hemp could be recycled into paper."

Smith says that paper made from hemp fibre is better quality and longer lasting than paper made from wood pulp, and that hemp seed, which contains negligible amounts of THC, is in some ways even better than soy beans as a source of protein. He also says that both hemp textiles and hemp paper can be made as fine or as coarse as their cotton and wood pulp competition.

Ironically, Smith believes that as hemp cloth becomes more widely available and the prices drop to a level comparable with cotton, it is the superiority of the cloth itself that will be the biggest selling point with consumers.

"Hemp textiles are roughly four times as durable as cotton, and they can be recycled into paper. If you look at the bottom line, consumers will buy hemp over cotton if the prices are the same," he said.

When Hempshack first started retailing hemp clothes and items last year, Smith found that wholesale prices for imported, finished goods were too high. Smith said that the wholesale cost of hemp pants, for example, was \$65. "Even with a mark-up on that price we had an incredible amount of interest, but sales were tough," he said.

Earlier this year Hempshack gave up retailing and decided to

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— HALIFAX ENTREPRENEUR ROBERT SMITH

make their own finished goods from imported hemp cloth, which they imported for a price comparable to that mentioned earlier in the article. They hired two professional seamstresses and started distributing their Canadian made goods.

"We made hemp cases, belts, bracelets, hackey sacks, and a half dozen styles of bags, and we found that we could wholesale them to the Black Market and Plovers in Halifax for half the cost of imported goods," said Smith.

Since then sales have been brisk, and he has found other retailers in the Maritimes to carry his products. Recently he hired a professional sales representative to expand his market.

"Right now, there is not only lots of room for Hempshack to grow, but there's lots of room for other entrepreneurs to do exactly what we're doing," he said. "Their is definitely a market for a Canadian-based textile industry making items from imported hemp cloth, but the benefits would be immense if we could produce our own hemp textiles. It would provide work for farmers, textile workers, salesman,

and managers. The economic spin-offs could be enormous, especially with the entire U.S. market at our disposal."

"With hemp's potential to help the farm economy, save the forests by replacing hardwood and pulp, replace fossil fuels with cleaner burning fuels, and create a top-to-bottom Canadian-owned textile industry, I don't understand why we're not growing it everywhere in Canada," Smith said.

Kime, who is now into his second year of hemp cultivation, said, "There are now four provinces doing field trials: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta."

Kime is growing 18 acres of hemp this year under a research license from Health Canada, and he uses government issued, low-THC seeds that were originally developed in Europe. "So far we've done research on fibre extraction with our first crop," he said.

He has not yet started developing methods for making textiles, due to the involved process it requires, but Tillsonburg hemp fibre has been made into paper and medium strength fibreboard. He says that in two to five years the capability to process thousands of acres of hemp will be available in Canada.



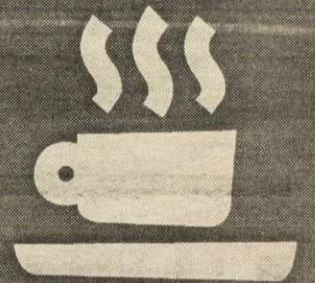
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