

Help Make Locally-grown Industrial Hemp Part of Ohio's Energy-Efficient Green Economy By: Jeremy Koosed, Greater Akron Partnership for Sustainability ecowatch.com Jan 09

Change is in the air, but for many of us committed to planetary protection, the pace of change often feels sluggish and leaves much to be desired. Assigning blame to bureaucratic red tape or apathy offers little relief to those who yearn for more. The members of the Greater Akron Partnership for Sustainability (GAPS), are protecting air quality, reducing waste and expanding local agricultural capacity.

The widespread use of industrial hemp could result in numerous environmental and economic benefits, including less reliance on fossil fuels, especially from foreign sources; more efficient use of energy; reduction of atmospheric build-up of carbon dioxide and agricultural pesticide use; and forest conservation. Hemp is superior to many other plants for many uses. Present limitations on the use of industrial hemp are economically, environmentally and socially irrational.

In contrast with many environmental organizations, restoring the freedom to grow industrial hemp is one issue we refuse to overlook. **Armed with knowledge and our mid-western attitudes, GAPS is committed to making locally-grown hemp part of Ohio's energy-efficient economy.**

Ironically, American consumption of hemp products rivals that of any other nation but domestic farmers are restricted from supplying this demand because federal law draws no distinction between industrial hemp and the drug marijuana. Without question, ages of evolution have made industrial hemp and marijuana genetically distinct strains of Cannabis. Whereas marijuana may contain anywhere from 3-15 percent THC (the psychoactive agent behind the high), hemp grown for fiber and seed contains 0.3 percent THC or less. Due to its unalterable non-drug status, more than 30 industrialized nations grow hemp and export it to the U.S.

Despite efforts by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency to suppress this legitimate and historically revered crop, people love hemp and the industry is truly blossoming. Retail sales of hempseed foods in North America reached \$33 million in 2008, a 65 percent growth rate from the year before, according to the Hemp Industries Association. Hempseed oil is used in many varieties of soaps and body care products and their retail sales for 2008 are estimated at \$80 million.

Ohio farmers and entrepreneurs are showing their affinity for hemp as well. The Ohio Valley Herbal Products Co., based in East Liverpool, has a best-selling hemp body oil. Founder Marina Schaum describes hemp oil as the richest source of Essential Fatty Acids. "That's why we use it. It's a deeply penetrating and restorative element," says Schaum. When the hemp oil comes over the border, it comes with a certificate that it contains no THC.

Cleveland-based Earth Maid, specializing in earth-friendly cleaning products, also produces a popular personal care line including hemp lotion. "Natural products like hempseed oil are better absorbed by our bodies and are more harmonious with our system," notes Kelly Kadas, the business-savvy Clevelander behind Earth Maid.

Farmers and producers in the Cuyahoga Valley are also helping hemp make a resurgence. Raw foods chef Julie Wandling uses hulled hempseed in some of their products at West Akron's Countryside Farmers Market. "The nutrient properties of hempseed are marvelous. It's rare to find such a complete protein source in the plant kingdom," Wandling said. Hempseed oil is great in salad dressings or hummus but should not be heated up because heat degrades the good fats. As an organic source of Omega-3's and Omega-6 essential fatty acids, hemp has none of the contaminants found in fish.

Ashland farmer and Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association member David Benchhoff would like to grow hemp on his land. "If we are serious about reducing our reliance on petroleum, look at how much fabric is petrol-based. It wasn't always like that. Hemp was the fiber of choice on sea-faring ships for centuries. It's really a no brainer," Benchhoff said.

GAPS is petitioning the Ohio Department of Agriculture to support hemp farming in conjunction with asking Ohio's Congressional delegation to join U.S Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-11, Lakewood, in co-sponsoring HR 1009, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act. This act would amend the Controlled Substances Act to distinguish between industrial hemp and marijuana, thereby lifting federal restrictions and allowing pro-hemp laws at the state level to go into effect.

When asked to comment for this article, the Ohio Ag. Deptment stated that "Industrial Hemp is not an existing Ohio industry, nor to the best of our knowledge an emerging industry. Any discussion regarding new

industries in Ohio must include and consider current federal laws, rules and regulations.”

Given that President-elect Barack Obama supported hemp bills in the Illinois State Senate, it's likely that federal restrictions will soon be lifted. By formulating a policy to permit hemp farming, Ohio policy makers have an opportunity to keep our state ahead of the curve. GAPS will be assembling hemp products to distribute in gift baskets to the Dept. of Agriculture and elected officials. We are optimistic about opening up this market to Ohio farmers but help is needed to overcome the institutional code-of-silence that has suppressed progress and meaningful debate. Many public officials are either uninformed about hemp or appear to be ambivalent. The lack of hemp education has served chemical and petroleum intensive agribusinesses while maintaining a disgraceful restriction on the rights of American citizens. **As a source of fiber, food, fuel and limitless biodegradable materials, hemp has provided the means for survival during some of our most defining challenges.** As a broad-based organization, GAPS clearly has our work cut out for us. □ Assistance from fellow Ohioans is always appreciated

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Contact your representatives today and ask them to co-sponsor HR 1009, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act bill. This holiday season be sure to buy hemp products at natural food stores and support this sustainable industry. For more information contact, Jeremy Koosed at ajkoosed@gmail.com. Check out www.votehemp.com for the facts on hemp and the latest news.