

HEMP INDUSTRY



Jerry Whiting



EAT YOUR HEMP!

HEMP IS SOMEWHERE between exotic and mainstream. Exotic only because all too many think “hemp” is a synonym, or worse yet, a coverup for pot. It’s been three years since hemp was legalized by the federal government and yet confusion remains about the distinction between the two. The proliferation of CBD products in drugstores, grocery stores and other retail outlets means companies are making hemp based products and consumers are buying them. It’s on the shelf in front of you wherever you go.

PHOTO BY ADOBE

Hemp’s popularity is its biggest problem – thousands of farmers grew hemp for the CBD market. They grew too much and prices dropped through the floor. Many farmers and processors lost their shirts. Some hemp farmers gave up and didn’t grow hemp at all in 2021. There’s little reason that 2022 will be much different.

There’s still a viable market for hemp grown for the extraction market. CBD isn’t the only cannabinoid the plant produces – CBG is beginning to receive the attention it deserves, and like CBD it also interacts with our endocannabinoid system (ECS).

The growing interest in CBG and other so-called minor cannabinoids will breathe life into the currently stagnate CBD market.

The bigger and yet untapped hemp market is food. Not only is hemp edible, it’s incredibly healthy and can be made into literally hundreds of different products. You may have seen or even purchased dehulled hemp seeds (hemp hearts) or hemp milk. Both can be found in grocery stores nationwide. Both belong in your kitchen.

SPRINKLE HEMP SEEDS ON YOUR SALAD, PIZZA, MAC AND CHEESE - AND EVERYTHING ELSE YOU CAN THINK OF.

Hemp grown for human consumption is a market American farmers have yet to cash in on. Right now the bulk of the hemp Americans eat or drink is grown in Canada – Manitoba to be exact. If we need to import what we eat, that points to a supply and demand imbalance American farmers can profit from.

Growing hemp cultivars specifically for seeds, whether for hemp hearts or hemp oil, assumes there are food processors ready to make and sell hemp foods. Therein lies a potential chicken and the egg choke point: Farmers need to sell their crop to processors and processors need crops to make foods. The hemp food market is potentially HUGE. Plant based foods are hot. You don’t have to be vegetarian, let alone vegan, to enjoy a plant based burger – even one with bacon and cheese.

Let’s talk about hemp milk. If hemp can be grown organically using regenerative techniques that use less water and sequester carbon, why oh why is almond milk the most popular milk?

Almond cultivation is centered in California’s Central Valley. The almond plantations are responsible for dropping the water table in a state already wrestling with drought conditions. The bees brought to almond farms to pollinate the crop infect each other and contribute to bee colony collapse. In other words, the almond industry is far from sustainable.

Hemp can be grown the right way, setting an example for conventional farmers. If we can grow hemp without excess chemicals, you can grow corn/wheat/soy and make money too.

I humbly suggest there’s a way we can all make hemp food a profitable industry sooner rather than later. Buy hemp granola, bread with hemp seeds and other hemp foods.

Buy hemp seeds to add to your morning oatmeal and homemade cookies.

Sprinkle hemp seeds on your salad, pizza, mac and cheese – and everything else you can think of.

Each and every time you go to a coffee house, ask if they have hemp milk. If they do, buy it. If they don’t, start a conversation. Politely suggest that if they did, you’d buy it.

Ask your Starbucks barista if they have hemp milk. Ask them often. Ask them at every Starbucks you go to. Lobby your sympathetic friends and family members to do the same thing. If we knock on the door loud enough, they’ll answer it.