

Industrial Hemp Growing Meeting Topic

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Lancaster Farming Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — More than 200 farmers and agri-industry representatives were registered Friday afternoon for an informational meeting, described by a proponent as "historic," about growing hemp in the area.

Farmers, industry representatives, and curiosity seekers were set to meet for the presentation on hemp growing and processing at Yoder's Restaurant in New Holland.

Speaking to *Lancaster Farming* on Thursday this week, Shawn Patrick House, Lancaster Hemp Company, said the event was "historic" because it showed how important hemp products have been since the U.S. was founded and the industries that still rely on hemp production.

For too long, according to House, the government has been restricting what farmers have been allowed to grow. The cousin to the illegal marijuana plant, industry hemp has gotten a wrongful and undeserved bad reputation, according to the hemp broker.

"If you restrict people, you restrict ideas and potential," he said.

He noted that in 1937, *Popular Mechanics* noted that 25,000 products are made from hemp, what the magazine called the "new billion dollar crop," he said. Hemp can be used to make "cellophane to dynamite to food to textiles," said House.

The meeting was scheduled to be an informational fact-gathering session for farmers and industry representatives, according to Jane Balmer, speaker at the event.

Balmer noted that, in light of extraordinarily depressed tobacco prices, farmers need alternatives.

Hemp growing can be one of them, noted House.

House said he has taken his hemp product display on the road in the past, including one stopover a few years ago at the Acres USA/EcoAg Conference at the Lancaster Host Farm Resort. Recently House attended the Pennsylvania Certificated Organic Agricultural Conference in Bird In Hand and travels throughout the area, presenting the idea of growing hemp.

At the exhibit during Friday's informational meeting at Yoder's, the exhibit included hemp products from raw materials, including hurds, silver, bark, stalk, sterilized seed, and tow.

Textile and industrial applications from hemp include fabrics, wood, compressed fiber, rope, cosmetic oil, and clothing. Food on display included hulled hempseed, bread, "Hempzels" (locally baked hemp pretzels), and other treats.

Also, cosmetic products can be made from hemp.

The display includes an educational center explaining the local, state, and national history of hemp and books on healthcare and items denoting the benefits of growing industrial hemp.

Thousands of acres have been devoted to growing hemp regionally, said House. He knows of a Halifax area farmer with 250 acres in hemp, and another in New Providence. But many agribusinesses

that support for or consult for hemp growers were expected to attend.

Speaking on behalf of the loosely-knit Pennsylvania Hemp Growers Association, House said that many growers want to be free to grow the products in demand.

"I'm a free-market person," said House. "I'm not interested in having to obtain permits and licenses and all that 'politicalness.'" As part of the presentation, a 20-minute video produced during World War II, "Hemp For Victory," outlined the importance of hemp at one time to the country.

The oldest mill in Pennsylvania dates back to the 1720s.

House noted that William Penn tried to convince German farmers to settle the Conestoga River region for hemp production.

One hemp production town was Hempfield, in Lancaster County.

"The colonials used to make

people manufacture hemp," said House.

House touts the agri-environmental benefits of growing hemp, including its natural ability to remove hard metals from the ground. The biomass product can be used for ethanol production.

It can be used to make varnishes and paints.

One item on display at the informational meeting was a car part. Information received from House includes a story of Henry Ford's "biomass car" from the March 1941 issue of *Popular Science Magazine*, a hemp-fabricated car Ford "grew from the soil."

One of the strongest demands for hemp over the years was for hemp pulp paper rather than tree pulp, to reduce the cutting of trees. An informational sheet noted that one acre of hemp equals 4.1 acres of trees for paper during the same 20-year period.

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