

Even in Legal States Farmers Reluctant to Grow Hemp

By Conan Milner
Epoch Times Staff

When Colorado voters legalized recreational marijuana last year, they also granted approval for industrial hemp. Even though hemp is not psychoactive, unlike marijuana, would-be hemp farmers are even more reluctant to grow it.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture finalized a regulatory framework for industrial hemp last fall, and hemp farmers can register with the state starting March 1. But a good crop requires quality seed, and farmers risk losing federal aid if they import nonsterilized seed from outside the state.

"In order to avoid breaking federal law a farmer would have to get [the seed] from within Colorado," Ron Carleton, Colorado's deputy commissioner of agriculture, told Aspen Daily News.

While hemp has been one of the world's key crops for centuries, it was banned in the United States in the 1950s and was later classified as a Schedule I controlled substance. While hemp is related to marijuana, it only contains trace amounts of the euphoric tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), rendering it worthless as a drug but valuable as a food, fiber, and building material source. Serious growers seek seed stock from Canada or one of several other countries that permit hemp farming.

In the 20 states eager to grow hemp once again, the obstacle is federal law, and farmers are urging a change. At the 95th Annual Convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation on Jan. 14, the nation's largest



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack on July 18, 2012. Vilsack recently spoke with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to consider whether hemp deserves its Schedule I status.

farm lobby enacted a policy resolution to repeal "the classification of industrial hemp as a controlled substance." Delegates from the Indiana Farm Bureau led the effort.

"At a time when small farms are innovating and diversifying to remain competitive, we should provide every opportunity to increase farm incomes and allow the next generation the ability to continue living off the land as their families have for generations," said Indiana Farm Bureau Policy Adviser Kyle Cline in a news release.

Crop of Opportunity

One state pushing particularly hard for hemp is Kentucky. The Bluegrass State was renowned for its hemp generations ago, and since the market for tobacco has diminished, many struggling Kentucky

farmers want to return to what their grandfathers grew.

Because it is a controlled substance, officials have been skeptical of hemp, but a growing hemp industry is changing minds. In an interview with the Lexington Herald-Leader on Jan. 17, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack said that he sees industrial hemp as opportunity.

"It's an opportunity that could create additional ways in which we can use our land effectively and efficiently, and clearly it is a product that is in demand because Canadians are selling a lot of it," he said.

Vilsack recently spoke with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to consider whether hemp deserves its Schedule I status.

"If we can grow it, and it doesn't create a problem with

criminal prosecutions, that would be a good thing. I am looking at ways in which we can diversify agriculture, using our natural resources more effectively to rebuild the rural economy," Vilsack said.

Holder recently said that banks can deposit money from marijuana growers in states where it is legal, but his position on hemp remains unclear. In August 2013, the attorney general stated that the federal government would not challenge state laws permitting cannabis. When Kentucky officials asked him to clarify whether the same hands-off approach applied to hemp, Holder never responded.

Hemp Amendment

If the attorney general won't revisit federal hemp restrictions, the plant may find its way back to American fields via the farm bill. An amendment in the just passed House version of the bill, H.R. 2642: "Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013," aims to legalize industrial hemp production. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) introduced the amendment along with Reps. Jared Polis (D-Colo.) and Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.). Massie said that support for hemp in the Senate will allow the amendment to survive final approval.

"The inclusion of our industrial hemp amendment in the farm bill reflects widespread support for cultivating industrial hemp and proves Congress can work together in a bipartisan fashion to help the American economy at a time when creating jobs is a national priority," Massie said in a Jan. 28 statement.



AP PHOTO/BILL RICHARD

Martin Richard, 8, on April 11, 2013. Martin was killed in the April 15, 2013, bombings at the Boston Marathon.

Prosecutors Seek Death for Boston Bombing Suspect

By Denise Lavoie

BOSTON—Federal prosecutors Thursday announced they will seek the death penalty against 20-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the Boston Marathon bombing, accusing him of betraying his adopted country by carrying out a carefully planned terrorist attack without remorse.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's decision to press for Tsarnaev's execution was widely expected. The twin blasts last April killed three people and wounded more than 260. Seventeen of the thirty federal charges against Tsarnaev—including using a weapon of mass destruction to kill—carry the possibility of the death penalty.

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Eric Holder,
attorney general

said in a statement of just two terse and dispassionate sentences that instantly raised the stakes in one of the most wrenching criminal cases Boston has ever seen.

Tsarnaev has pleaded not guilty. No trial date has been set.

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