



Industrial Hemp coming to a field near you

by Tony Budden, Hemporium

The Agricultural Research Council has been conducting hemp trials in South Africa for several years now, and there is a good chance that legislation could soon be changed in order for this versatile and environmentally beneficial plant to be grown here within the next few years.

For many people the word hemp conjures up negative feelings associated with drug use and counter-culture activities. What these people do not realise is that this association is the result of dogma that has been fed to them during the past century and that industrial hemp is actually very beneficial both to humanity and the planet. Many South Africans have already seen the potential of this wonder plant and are putting together projects to prove this to the government.

Hemp vs Marijuana

The first challenge has been to differentiate between industrial hemp and its cousin, marijuana (dagga). Although they are from the same species, hemp is grown predominantly for its fibre and seed while dagga is cultivated for its psychoactive tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content. Most industrial hemp strains have a THC content of less than 0.3%, while dagga typically has between 3% and 15% THC content in the flowers. Industrial hemp has absolutely no value as a psychoactive recreational drug, and law enforcement can be trained to recognise the difference between the two.

Hemp's versatility

The search is on for alternatives to pesticide-greedy cotton, forest-destroying paper, war-generating and polluting petrochemicals, and nutritionally devoid western diets. Although hemp is only part of the solution, many believe that it is the only known renewable natural resource that can meet nearly all our requirements to move back to a healthier, greener planet. Almost every part of the hemp plant can be used for an array of different products. Hemp fibre is the

Figure 1



Figure 2

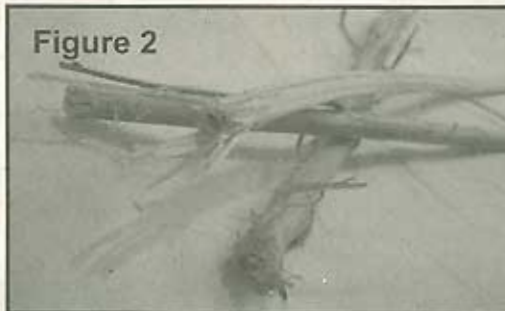


Fig 1: Three month old hemp plants grown at the trial crop in Stellenbosch

Fig 2: The woody hemp stalk

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OUR VISION

WESSA is a membership-based environmental organisation that promotes public participation in caring for the Earth. We embrace professionalism and sound corporate governance, fostering collaborative partnerships to succeed in our Mission. With enthusiasm and a spirit of unity, we work to achieve a South Africa that is wisely managed by all to ensure environmental sustainability.





Hemp fabric can be spun as smooth as silk or as coarse as sackcloth



Hemp Accessories



Hemp cosmetics made with omega rich hemp seed oil



Hemp Clothes and Accessories

longest, strongest vegetable fibre known to man and its woody stalk can be used as a natural sustainable building product or moulded into cloth. Hemp seeds are also highly nutritional as they contain the optimum ratio of essential fatty acids for our body, making it a useful food source.

Chiefly a weed, it grows without much water or chemical input. Just one hemp t-shirt, when compared to one cotton t-shirt, saves hundreds of litres of water and over a cup of chemicals.

Essentially, what hemp can offer South Africa is job creation, housing solutions and nutrition, answering 3 very pressing problems that we face. This can be done very cost effectively and through environmentally-responsible methods.

Hemp and Farming

Hemp production is especially applicable to emerging farmers as it does not require the expensive agro-chemicals such as fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides that many conventional crops do. In order to make hemp farming accessible, we need to ensure that they have access to seeds, farming and harvesting equipment, processing machinery and markets. To meet this challenge, the concept of the Sustainable Integrated Village in Agro-ecology, or SIVA, has been developed. SIVA will be centres for training, seed distribution, equipment and machinery stores and will also be responsible for managing the farmers in the area. A pilot SIVA Project has been developed in Sir Lowry's Pass village and the hope is to extend it countrywide. It is only through this system that a hemp industry could become a success in South Africa.

Hemp and Housing

An exciting project to come out of this concept is the "Grow your own House" project which involves using the hemp

stalk (hurd) to make cement. The hurd is very high in cellulose, and when ground up and mixed with ash and lime, a natural cement is formed. The French have been instrumental in developing this technology, and there have been over 5000 houses built, using this method, in France.

The chipped stalk and lime mix can also be cast into bricks which can withstand the same amount of pressure as clay bricks, but are 7 times lighter. Hemp fibre can also be woven into insulation/isolation mats that are an environmentally friendly alternative to the fibre-glass insulation currently used in most houses.

The "Grow your own House" project has already been registered with Clean Development Mechanism as a carbon credit producing project, the first agricultural project that will benefit the second economy as the project aims to build 10-20 000 low cost houses in the next 10 years.

Legalising Hemp

The main obstacle that we still face is the legislation that will allow the Department of Agriculture to manage industrial hemp as an agricultural product, thereby separating it from the psychoactive/medicinal strains that will remain under the control of the Department of Health. This has been successfully achieved in over 30 countries worldwide and is a model that has been proven to be successful.

Progress is being made and the future looks green. Hopefully we will soon be able to take advantage of the solutions this wonderful plant has to offer, especially looking at the bigger picture of our current global climate crisis. Hemp has done it all before, and can do it all again.

For more info, please visit www.hemporium.com or visit our flagship store at 114 Constantia Main Road, Cape Town.

MORE GLOBAL WARMING TIPS

Steve du Toit's article (page 3), highlights the importance of action so throughout the newsletter, take a look at some of the (paraphrased and adapted) suggestions from Time 9 April 2007.

Consider renewable energy sources like solar electric systems, compact wind turbines and geothermal heat pumps to help power your home.

