

# Purdue shows off first legal hemp fields in decades

By MAUREEN HAYDEN CNHI State Reporter | Posted: Tuesday, August 25, 2015 8:00 pm

ROMNEY – The high fence surrounding a Purdue University research farm here was installed to keep out pesky deer, but this summer it served a second purpose: Keeping federal drug agents at bay.

The research farm, 10 miles south of Purdue's West Lafayette campus, is home to the first legally grown industrial hemp crop in Indiana in decades.

To grow the plant, a Purdue team had to secure a permit from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. It also had to comply with a host of security measures — including a fence high enough to keep out thieves who might mistake the Purdue crop for its more famous and lookalike sibling: marijuana.

On Tuesday, Purdue opened the farm for its first-ever “hemp field day,” to show off the crop's progress to a group of farmers and scientists along with aspiring hemp entrepreneurs.

“I never thought I'd be growing hemp,” said Purdue plant biologist Kevin Gibson, clad in a Purdue polo shirt adorned with an iron-on patch in the shape of a marijuana leaf.

Few would have.

Hemp, grown commercially in Indiana in the early 1940s to supply fiber for the resource-drained military, has been illegal to grow since a 1970 ban.



## Hemp Purdue 01

Purdue University plant biologist Kevin Gibson explains the challenges faced by researchers in growing the cannabis sativa plant for hemp production. Purdue was cleared to grow the crop at one of its farms, under last year's federal farm bill that allowed states to re-start limited hemp production for agricultural research purposes.

That's when the federal Controlled Substances Act lumped industrial hemp with marijuana and outlawed production of both, despite their chemical differences.

The 2014 federal farm bill reconsidered industrial hemp's potential as a cash crop. Its growth was limited to agricultural research, though, and only after the grower obtains a waiver from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

Purdue, the state's leading agricultural research university, got the waiver along with a 50-pound bag of hemp seed imported from Canada.

The seed cost \$300; shipping it by Fed Ex cost another \$300, said Purdue agronomy professor Ron Turco, who oversees the hemp research project.

After just one growing season, in which the seed was planted late due to a permit delay and then drenched by record rainfall, Turco sums up the research conclusion this way:

"It can grow in Indiana. We know that," he said. "The rest of it is political."

Indiana lawmakers have been hesitant to move beyond the current constraints, fearful that by opening the door to legal hemp, legal marijuana might sneak in, too.

The plant growing in the Purdue fields has a certified level of THC — the psychoactive chemical in marijuana — of less than .3 percent. But it looks much like the more potent version of the cannabis sativa plant that carries a THC content as high as 35 percent.

"It all looks like marijuana to me," said Purdue agricultural economist Michael Wetzstein, on hand at the field day to discuss the economics of growing and marketing hemp, in the event it does become legal.

His advice to farmers was conservative: "If you're a risk-taker and tired of growing corn and soybeans, it might be worth it," he said. "But I don't see the market for it yet."

Hemp enthusiasts with the Indiana Hemp Industries Association, which co-hosted the field day, disagree. They point to the wide production of the plant in Canada and China, for example, and boast of its use in a range of household products already in the U.S., including paper, cosmetics and textiles.

Association member Scott McKay, a Kokomo firefighter, is interested in hemp research because of the potential of using its fiber in protective clothing for first-responders. He also puts hemp oil in his morning coffee.

“It works great as an anti-inflammatory,” he said.

Don Scheiber, who drove from Lafayette to see the Purdue hemp fields, eats imported hemp seeds as a source of protein. The environmentalist and vegetarian calls hemp “the crop of the future.”

He wonders why legislators haven’t done more to clear the way for industrial hemp production in agriculturally rich Indiana.

That may not happen anytime soon. Purdue's permit came with a DEA mandate: All the plants and any seeds produced have to be destroyed by year’s end.

To continue the hemp research for another year, Purdue will have to secure another DEA permit – a time-consuming task without a guarantee that it will be granted.

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