

DR. BRONNER'S MAGIC SOAPS ARE THE BIGGEST USER OF HEMP OIL IN THE WORLD. WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE PROVIDED SOME OF THE LEADERSHIP AND MONEY ON A PATH TO GETTING INDUSTRIAL HEMP LEGALIZED.

A QUOTE DR. BRONNER LOVED WAS: "ONE MAN AND THE TRUTH IS A MAJORITY!" THE TRUTH IS THAT INDUSTRIAL HEMP IS A WONDERFUL CROP — BENEFITING FARMERS, INDUSTRY, HEALTH — EVERYONE ON SPACESHIP EARTH.

THIS ARTICLE, BY MARK SAUER, IS ONE OF THE BEST WRITTEN TO BRING YOU UP TO DATE ON HEMP. SHARE IT WITH OTHERS.

Hemp industry may blossom

Change in legal status could allow proliferation of U.S. products

By Mark Sauer

Staff Writer

"There's hemp oil in this? You're kidding! I've been buying this soap for years and never realized that." Tamra Miller said.

She was at the Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Market examining the label of a gallon jug of "Dr. Bronner's 18-in-1 Pure castle Soap." A key ingredient is hemp oil made from the first cousin of the marijuana plant.

"I buy it for the kids at my daughter's school. Maybe they're just a little bit happier washing their hands with this stuff." Miller said with a smile.

Hemp is the highly versatile member of the cannabis-plant family that doesn't get you high. It remains a four-letter word as far as the federal government's war on drugs is concerned.

But hemp's legal status in the United States has quietly undergone a dramatic change.

Without comment, much

less fanfare, the Drug enforcement Administration last month let pass a deadline to appeal its case for banning consumable hemp products to the U.S. Supreme Court.

A three-year effort to get hemp seed, hemp oil, lip balm, cereals, breads, frozen waffles and other consumable products made from imported hemp removed from America's markets ended when the government quit pursuing its ban.

Hemp advocates, including hundreds of niche business and agricultural backers in more than a dozen states, note the plant is water efficient, soil-enriching, pest-resistant and a remarkably useful source of products from essential fatty acids in hemp oil to textiles and building products.

Hemp Advocates see numerous beneficial uses

Consumable hemp products contain trace amounts of THC, the psycho-active property in marijuana. That's why the DEA in October 2001 proposed to ban such products, which are imported from Canada and nations in Europe and Asia where cultivation and production of "industrial hemp" is legal even though marijuana remains outlawed.

But the hemp Industries Association — 250 U.S. companies offering products like protein bars, milk-free cheese, granola, bulk hemp seed, hemp oil and veggie burgers with trace amounts of THC from non-psycho-active cannabis plants — challenged the ban.

The hempsters relied on the argument that the non-narcotic variety of poppy seeds contains trace amounts of opi-

ates, yet are widely consumed and perfectly legal.

As with poppy seeds, advocates argued, there's not enough THC present to get consumers high if they ate a truckload of hemp-products. The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco agreed, blocking the DEA's proposed ban.

A Drug Enforcement Administration spokesman referred inquiries to the Department of Justice, which did not return phone messages seeking comment. The DEA argued in court that any product containing THC should be considered a controlled substance and prohibited under U.S. drug laws.

"All the facts were on our side — industrial hemp has never been psychoactive," said David Bronner, whose Escondido based Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps along with other hemp businesses, donated \$200,000 to the fight against the DEA's ban.

"But the market really suffered. There was a grace period before the DEA's ban was to go into effect (in March 2002), and retailers everywhere were pulling their products because

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The DEA lost its bid for a ban on hemp-based products. Hemp soap is among the items at the People's market in Ocean Beach. Roni Galgano / Union-Tribune

of this cloud in the marketplace, with potential product recalls and DEA busts looming.

As the grace period was about to expire last year, the 9th Circuit court issued a stay, temporarily blocking the DEA ban and placing the hemp industry into limbo.

"We were within two days from having to pull our (10 lines) of hemp products," said Nancy Casady, general manager of the Ocean Beach People's Market. "It took a lot of money and effort to get the government to finally realize we are talking about something quite different from marijuana."

Though hemp advocates are cheering the end of the ban, they bemoan

the fact that the hemp-products industry in the United States has fallen far behind Canada and the European Union.

"Canada provides the best example of what we expect to see the in U.S.," said Bronner (Canada legalized the growing of hemp). "They haven't had government harassment up there for the past five years, and hemp products have crossed over into the mainstream."

Casady sees great days ahead for hemp retailers. "I predict a big boom in the use of hemp oil and hemp seeds," she said. "Hemp is impervious to pests and doesn't require harmful pesticides. It can grow just about anywhere. It's good for the soil and incredibly useful."

"Hemp is really a miracle plant when you learn about it."

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Cannabis sativa, Latin for "the useful hemp," is synonymous with the mind-altering drug marijuana. But throughout history, the cannabis plant has been far more useful than as a means to get stoned.

Recent arguments for the medical benefits of THC-laden marijuana aside, the hemp plant has for thousands of years provided fiber for everything from rope to textiles, paper to building supplies, in addition to foodstuffs.

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were hemp farmers.

In 1937, as synthetic fibers were taking over the textile industry and use of hemp declined, the government passed the marihuana Tax Act, outlawing cultivation of the psychoactive form of cannabis.

Industrial hemp was excluded from the act, however, and cultivation of it remained legal. During World War II, the "Hemp for Victory" campaign spurred a surge in hemp farming, and cannabis fiber was used to make soldiers' boots, rucksacks and other essentials.

Industrial hemp, known as "ditch weed," still grows wild throughout the Midwest and other farm states (the government budgets \$13 million annually to eradicate it).

Even hemp backers, who hope to greatly expand the estimated \$7-million-a-year industry, acknowledge that the plant cannot supplant every oil, seed and fiber on the market. It is not ideal as cooking oil, for instance, and oil from flax (which has flavor issues) and other grains may provide more essential fats.

Hemp advocates merely want an even playing field on which to compete with other foodstuffs and fibers,



Tamra Miller examines a gallon jug of Dr. Bronner's soap at O B People's Market. She's bought the soap for her daughter's school without realizing it is hemp-based.
Roni Galgano / Union-Tribune

one without the stigma attached to a psychoactive drug.

In 1970, Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention Act, superseding the 1937 law. It made no provision distinguishing industrial hemp from marijuana, meaning domestic cultivation of all forms of the *cannabis sativa* plant was illegal.

The Drug Enforcement Administration's position is that industrial-hemp plants — which are generally taller and have different leaves — are difficult to distinguish from marijuana plants, especially from helicopters and spotter planes.

The government contends a hemp farmer could easily mix marijuana into his hemp field (though it would not be wise because cross-pollinating hemp plants would weaken the pot plant's potency).

"At first blush, the government's argu-

ment seems reasonable," said Alexis Baden-Meyer, spokeswoman for Vote Hemp, the lobbying arm of the hemp industry. "It would be a big problem for law enforcement if it had to prove every time that the "leafy substance" confiscated was pot, and not legally grown industrial hemp.

"But the way Canada and other nations do it is to test the plants on the farm. The bill we're proposing would allow hemp to be grown only by licensed farmers using certified seed. State and federal officials could go to the farm and test at any time. It works in Europe, in Australia and New Zealand, and throughout Asia where industrial hemp is grown."

Albert Lewis, owner of Descanso-based Hempys, makes pants, shirts, backpacks, wallets and hats from hemp-based textiles he imports from China and Romania.

He said industrial hemp grown domesti-

cally would significantly lower his costs — and the price of his products — while providing a viable, environmentally friendly industry and American's jobs.

"The DEA's decision to drop its ban is an important symbolic victory," Lewis said. "The Administration talks about freedom, opportunity, ingenuity and free enterprise. Here's an industry that fits all those categories, and yet there was a strong effort to stamp it out."

"Dropping the ban is a victory for freedom, the American spirit and American values."

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David Bronner and other advocates of consumable hemp products note that hemp oil is an excellent alternative source of omega-3s — the essential fatty acids found in fish oils — for those concerned about mercury and other toxins in fish.

Adding omega-3s to the diet "seems to lower the risk of heart attacks because omega-3 fatty acids reduce the clotting tendency of the blood and improve cholesterol profiles," according to Dr. Andrew Weil, the natural-foods booster and best-selling author.

"They also have a natural anti-inflammatory effect that makes them useful for people with arthritis and autoimmune disorders."

Eyeing a bottle of hemp oil at the Ocean Beach People's Market, Jan Hall said she learned about the benefits of hemp from her granddaughter, Camille Berry, a freshman majoring in biochemistry at UCSD.

"She's kind of a little hippie, like we all used to be in the '60s," Hall said, smiling. "She's told me about all sorts of uses for hemp — everything from powering a diesel engine to moisturizing creams — and she has caused me to think it is a really good substance."

"It was banned for some sort of connection to the drug culture. It seems to me that's kind of a shame."

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