

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

While in Session
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801
(907) 465-3704
Fax: (907) 465-2529



While in Anchorage
716 W. 4th Ave
Anchorage, AK
(907) 269-0169
Fax: (907) 269-0172

SENATOR JOHNNY ELLIS

SB 8: Alaska Grown Industrial Hemp Act

Industrial hemp is an ancient and versatile crop that was commonly grown in the United States until the 1930s. In fact, the first U.S. flag and early blue jeans were both made from hemp fiber. Recent changes to federal law give states more freedom to research and farm industrial hemp. This legislation defines industrial hemp, requires growers be licensed with the state and allows an individual to plant, grow, harvest, possess, sell, or buy industrial hemp if the industrial hemp does not contain more than .3% tetrahydrocannabinol.

Industrial hemp should not be confused with marijuana or varieties of the *Cannabis* plant that have high levels of THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol). Industrial hemp refers to varieties of the *Cannabis* plant that have a low level of THC, for example, in Kentucky an industrial hemp plant is defined as having a THC concentration of less than 1%. In this legislation and in Montana, Maine, and other states it is defined as a concentration of less than .3% THC.

The spectrum of possible hemp products is impressive. Besides traditional paper or fiber products, industrial hemp can be used for building materials such as carpet and insulation and even be made into “hempcrete.” Hemp oil can be used for plastics, paint, and cosmetic and pharmaceutical applications.

Due to hemp’s illegal status, little research has been done on the viability of arctic hemp crops in Alaska. However, British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba have thriving commercial hemp operations and Canadian studies offer promise for the production of industrial hemp in northern climates.

Allowing farmers the freedom to farm this versatile and profitable agricultural commodity is a bipartisan issue. For years, Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) pushed to allow the farming of industrial hemp. His first bill in 2005 had 11 co-sponsors and his last bill in 2011 had 37 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle.

More recently, Senators Mitch McConnell(R-KY) and Rand Paul(R-KY) championed a provision included in the 2014 Farm Bill that would allow institutions of higher education and State Departments of Agriculture to grow or cultivate industrial hemp. The most recent federal spending bill also included a bipartisan amendment that prohibits the DEA from blocking implementation of the federal law allowing hemp cultivation for academic and agricultural research purposes in states that allow it.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 19 states currently have laws to provide for pilot studies and/or for hemp production as stipulated in the Farm Bill. Eight states have laws to promote the growth and marketing of industrial hemp. In 2000, the NCSL adopted a policy in support of the reintroduction of industrial hemp into American agriculture.

Currently the U.S. imports around \$2 billion annually in hemp products from Canada and China. States that lead on allowing their farmers and entrepreneurs to explore the free market potential of industrial hemp will have the opportunity to be at the forefront of an entirely new industry that could help bolster our farm communities and the Alaskan economy.