

NAIHC.org , San Diego, Calif., January 13, 2015 - This week American Farm Bureau members voiced their strong support for growing industrial hemp.

Farm Bureau's 355 voting delegates representing every crop and livestock sector in the United States voted 246 to 96 in favor of "the production, processing, commercialization and utilization of industrial hemp." Speaking at the leading U.S. farm organization's 96th annual convention, Illinois Farm Bureau delegate Chad Schutz said that after having "been asleep for 80 years," it's time to start growing industrial hemp again to "revitalize it in the U.S."

Madison County Illinois Farm Bureau President Steve Koeller calls it a major achievement that "after 15 years," Illinois' initiative has led Farm Bureau nationally to approve industrial hemp "as stand-alone policy." He's hopeful Farm Bureau's support will lead Congress to remove the remaining barriers to growing hemp in the U.S.

At [last year's Farm Bureau convention in Texas](#) , members voted to oppose the federal government's "classification of industrial hemp as a controlled substance." Under current federal law, non-drug industrial hemp remains banned because it is related to marijuana. The ban remains in force despite 2014 federal legislation which authorized states to create regulated programs to grow industrial hemp for research purposes. Last year's Farm Bureau vote adopted as national policy a resolution proposed by the Indiana Farm Bureau to legalize industrial hemp as a crop.

At the 2014 meeting, Indiana Farm Bureau Policy Advisor Kyle Cline explained that legalizing industrial hemp is important "because of the opportunity that it provides some farmers to diversify their operations and share in a new market opportunity. 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."

Cline said "Industrial hemp is one such opportunity that may work for some farmers in certain regions. Furthermore, industrial hemp will allow the U.S. farmer to share in income that is currently going overseas. Right now, it is legal to import hemp but illegal to produce it. Therefore, there is no opportunity currently to share in the profit."

Farm Bureau's support for industrial hemp follows support pledged earlier by other farm organizations.

In 2013, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture stated that:

“NASDA supports revisions to the federal rules and regulations authorizing commercial production of industrial hemp.”

“NASDA urges the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to collaboratively develop and adopt an official definition of industrial hemp that comports with definitions currently used by countries producing hemp. NASDA also urges Congress to statutorily distinguish between industrial hemp and marijuana and to direct the DEA to revise its policies to allow USDA to establish a regulatory program that allows the development of domestic industrial hemp production by American farmers and manufacturers.”

In 2009, National Grange voted to support hemp, stating that it “supports research, production, processing and marketing of industrial hemp as a viable agricultural activity.”

National Farmers Union passed their first pro-hemp resolution at their 2010 convention. The policy was updated at their 2013 convention and stated that the NFU supports:

“Urging the president, attorney general and Congress to direct the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to reclassify industrial hemp as a non-controlled substance and adopt policy to allow American farmers to grow industrial hemp under state law without affecting eligibility for USDA benefits.”

The Illinois Farm Bureau is another supporter, stating as policy that:

“We encourage research of market potential for the production and processing of industrial hemp. We will aggressively pursue actions necessary to allow research on the production of industrial hemp and require the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to issue permits to U.S. farmers allowing the production of this crop.”

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