

Hemp Questions regarding the feasibility of Hemp in South Africa

Feedback from the Hemp Feasibility Workshop, hosted by The National Agricultural Marketing Council, House of Hemp and The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, held at the Leriba Hotel, Centurion, Gauteng on 24/03/2017

The following questions were tasked for public comment by the event hosts, regarding the feasibility of Industrial Hemp in South Africa:

Would commercial Hemp legalisation be of use?

Yes.

Hemp is of use in dozens of industries, and all parts of the plant are used. It is often quoted that Hemp has “25000 different products” to be made from it, but even that is a conservative estimate. With so many industries *this one crop* can feed into, it is clearly evident that the legalisation of Hemp in South Africa would be of use. Removing unjustified restrictions on this plant will allow farmers and entrepreneurs access to this plant, where the true, practical potential of the plant may be realised.

By placing the crop in the public domain, rapid growth can take place and an industry can rapidly take shape. This is the case for all novel crops that did not have to undergo the unnecessary scrutiny that Hemp has. One pertinent example is Moringa, a crop increasingly flourishing in South Africa (agriculturally and economically) and especially grown by emerging farmers.

Current global interest in Hemp as agricultural commodity is at an all-time high, with demand currently exceeding supply.

Relegalising Hemp will pave the way for a globally competitive South African Hemp industry, which in turn would benefit South African society in innumerable ways and set the course for a green, sustainable future. *“Hemp is of the first necessity for the wealth and protection of this country”* Thomas Jefferson said in early America, but it is a statement well-suited to modern day South Africa. Hemp has enormous potential to contribute to the sustainability and prosperity of our society in the rapidly changing 21st century.

What are the legislative challenges for businesses in dealing with hemp?

Bureaucratic confusion with drug varieties is the main challenge facing Hemp industries, with Hemp, an agricultural crop, carrying the same regulatory stigma as other forms of Cannabis. This is not only uninformed and downright wrong, but the stigma also flows to other parts of society.

Fortunately, the public are becoming increasingly educated about Hemp and Cannabis as a whole, with Hemp entering the mainstream arena despite the fact that outdated laws and stubborn stakeholders have greatly limited progress.

HEMP HAS NO POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE – Its continued classification as a highly restricted drug plant is irrational. This view should be discouraged, especially in informed decision making for policy.

Current regulations discourage cultivation and use of this plant – as investors and developers are wary of investing in an illegal commodity. Very little infrastructure can be built and little research done towards establishing a Hemp industry because of this legislative hampering.

How should Hemp stakeholders be organised?

Any organisation would have to have at its core the rapid establishment of the SA Hemp Industry to become globally competitive, whilst at its heart serve to empower South African farmers, producers and Hemp entrepreneurs and guide policy reform.

A viable and sustainable Hemp Organisation should:

- ≡ Provide support in the cultivation, processing and use of Industrial hemp in South Africa/Africa
- ≡ Provide information and training to its members and promote cooperation between them
- ≡ Provide reliable support to (specifically emerging and smallholder) farmers
- ≡ Promote the use of Hemp as transformation tool
- ≡ Provide the public, media and governmental institutions with reliable, accurate and current information about Hemp in South Africa and globally
- ≡ Co-operate with other institutions and associations to promote Hemp in the multitude of potential applications in various industries
- ≡ Serve to coordinate and collect research on Hemp, like cultivation, processing and use, as well as on policy, market trends and economic figures
- ≡ Represent the Hemp industry in civil society and in Government, developing policies and recommendations for changes to current laws, regulations and guidelines in South Africa and the continent

What are the short, medium and long term recommendations for government (name two in each class)

Short:

-Relegalise Hemp

Remove restrictions on its cultivation, dismiss the inclusion of *Cannabis* in the Drug Act, also terminating the outdated process by which permission from the MCC must be sought to import Industrial Hemp cultivars and grow the crop, relying instead on the more suited agricultural acts (most pertinently: The Agricultural Pests Act 36 of 1983; The Plant Improvement Act 53 of 1976), with a potential addendum requiring Cannabinoid profiling and THC limits.

- Subsidise the Hemp industry

Promote the cultivation and processing of Hemp in SA, and kick-start Hemp research and agricultural extension through participatory research projects.

Medium:

- A focus on agricultural development of South African Hemp, including variety development, harvesting and processing industrial Hemp, and (notably) agricultural extension.
- Research and development of models that empower small-holder farmers and producers, to help overcome the challenge of “economies of scale” inherent to Hemp production, and make them competitive in the broader agricultural and economic landscape.

Long:

- Diversification of the hemp industry, promoting innovations in Hemp use to create a South African Hemp Industry that is not only globally competitive, but a global leader.
- Use hemp as a pillar to create a green economy, entrenching the use of this industrial crop in the many industries it is suited for, to create a green built environment, green economy, green society and golden future.

What are the blind spots in hemp engagements?

Industrial hemp is a very complex subject – Because it is stubbornly confused with drug-type varieties, because it can be utilised in so many different ways and for so many reasons, because agronomy of the crop will depend on its intended application (e.g. for seed, for fiber, for feed, for fuel), and because we have not had enough practical experience due to repressive legislation.

The Hemp issue becomes even more overwhelming when one considers that the potential applications of the crop currently seem limitless.

This complexity is difficult to appreciate in bureaucratic documents, creating unsuited, overcomplicated regulations and a skewed view of Hemp agronomy - making it impossible to capture the true benefits of this crop.

It is an industrial and food crop.

Industrial Hemp should not be confused with Dagga, which is grown mainly for THC content and cultivated entirely differently.

Hemp: Agriculture

Dagga: Horticulture

Any legalisation should take the above into serious consideration, and should put industrial hemp regulations *on par* with those applicable to other agricultural crops - like Mielies, Soy and Grains.

Regulation should be downgraded to a simple, efficient permitting system that merely ensures compliance with THC levels. Let farmers farm, let producers produce, let entrepreneurs innovate.

Make government's role support programmes, to most sustainably empower the Hemp industry. In this way government becomes a true custodian of the best interests of the people.

It will also allow researchers and government departments with 'real-life' data, instead of purely theoretical, with which they can work with and to which they can respond to, thereby assisting

farmers and producers with relevant information and support, thus ensuring a feasible industry.

On blindspots:

We simply cannot ignore the global hemp successes, and Hemp's truly astounding ability for rapid transformation.

Many countries, like Canada, China and the EU have Hemp promotion policies in place, with the amount of hectares dedicated to Hemp at unprecedented levels.

In Europe, harvests are already sold before they're planted, and still their demand exceeds supply.

This blatantly implies a good market for Hemp, and South Africa should take heed of the vision exhibited by these countries and the success of entrepreneurs in finding new and exciting uses for Hemp.

Malawi has taken heed, and in only two years is already poised to become an African leader in Hemp cultivation, whereas we have been continuously hampered through ill-conceived legislation and bureaucratic impediment.

Let's stop being scared of a simple agricultural crop.

Let's move forward.

Let's grow.

Let Hemp.