

Hemp businesses on the rise in Wisconsin, lawmaker says

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Hemp-related businesses are on the rise in Wisconsin, following the state's first growing season for the crop in more than 60 years.

That's according to Sen. Patrick Testin, who touted his recently introduced hemp bill yesterday before an audience of about 200 bankers, as part of the Wisconsin Bankers Association's Capitol Day event.

The Stevens Point Republican co-authored the bipartisan bill with input from DATCP as well as farming groups including the Wisconsin Hemp Alliance. He says the bill would align the state's hemp pilot program with the recent federal farm bill. It also includes a "truth in labeling" provision to give processors, retailers and consumers more peace of mind about the products they're buying or selling.

"I think the legislation that we have introduced is going to make this program more user-friendly; it's going to open up even more doors," Testin said. "This is really about opportunities for Wisconsin farmers, manufacturers, as well as our financial institutions. I'm hoping you guys get some customers out of this."

Testin told WisBusiness.com the bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions. He said it's likely to get a public hearing sometime next month.

As the hemp legislation proceeds through the Legislature, companies that deal with

hemp are planning expansions and adding jobs, building on the enthusiasm seen for last year's growing season. After the pilot was announced, DATCP was inundated with requests about growing and processing hemp.

Last year's harvest didn't exactly live up to that enthusiasm, according to Testin, due to grower inexperience, wet conditions and other factors.

Still, businesses are popping up all over the state that aim to capitalize on the opportunity hemp represents.

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