

Wisconsin Hemp Alliance: Hemp industry should be in the mix as Legislature builds agriculture package

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MADISON...With the Assembly expected to wrap up its last day of the legislative session this week, legislators continue to work on a final package of bills that would offer much needed tax relief and regulatory reform to help our state's farmers and agriculturalists.

One innovative measure that the legislature should consider passing in the agriculture package is Senate Bill 817, a bill that would establish a Wisconsin Hemp Fiber Innovation and Technology Accelerator in the Institute for Sustainable Technology at the University of Stevens Point.

“Sen. Patrick Testin and Rep. Tony Kurtz have authored bi-partisan legislation that, if enacted, will help establish Wisconsin as a national leader in hemp fiber research. Everyone in the hemp industry knows exactly how important this first step is for fiber,” said Rob Richard, President of the Wisconsin Hemp Alliance. “As legislators look for ways to bring innovation, diversification and market expansion to Wisconsin agriculture, they absolutely should not ignore the long-term growth potential in hemp. UW-Stevens Point's current programming avails itself very well to becoming an instant leader in this field and a community partner with Wisconsin hemp farmers.”

While other universities like Oregon State University, University of Kentucky, Murray State University, and Cornell University are becoming very aggressive in attracting research and funding for hemp, the UW-Madison and UW-Stevens Point have a

tremendous opportunity to play a key role in plant genetic, agronomic and cellulose/fiber material research.

Driftless Extracts in Lone Rock is one southwestern Wisconsin company already looking to partner with UW-Stevens Point to begin hemp fiber research for industrial purposes.

“We are currently building a supply network of farmers all over southern Wisconsin because there is serious interest and excitement in hemp, but just like any agricultural commodity, we still need research, innovation and markets for our farmers to realize sustainable profitability,” stated Ed Liegel, CEO of Driftless Extracts. “Hemp fiber can literally have thousands of uses in industries that cover textiles, construction, automotive, high tech, personal care, food and beverage, brown paper/packaging and so on. The Hemp Accelerator program will help position Wisconsin ahead of other states attempting to only capitalize on short-term hemp flower derivatives. Wisconsin’s established manufacturing base creates a natural market. If provided resources, a long-term marriage between manufacturing and agriculture will develop bringing sustainable prosperity to rural communities all over the state.”

“We’re asking legislators to recognize and understand the industry need for the Accelerator program. Once they do, our farmers win, hemp wins and Wisconsin agriculture wins. Time is short but the legislature can still get this done for our farmers.” Liegel concluded, “Private industry, individual benefactors and research institutions are ready to provide resources to the Accelerator program, but support from those in leadership is also imperative for this collaboration to work.”

The Wisconsin Hemp Alliance is a non-profit association of hemp seed and clone suppliers, growers, processors, retailers, and consumers engaging in advocacy, education, and promotion of hemp and hemp products.