

# Hemp help or hindrance



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## Hemp : A Help or a Hindrance?

Hemp, also known as *Cannabis sativa*, marijuana, grass, and by many other names, has not been a legal commercial crop in the United States for almost sixty years. As common two centuries ago as cotton is today, hemp is not seen on the market. As many groups urge for hemp to become legalized as a drug, many people are fighting for the plant to become legalized for its medical and industrial uses as well as its economic benefits. From shampoo or fuel for our automobiles, hemp is a hardworking, environmentally sound, and renewable resource.

Hemp is an ancient drug whose uses included treating gout, malaria, gas pains, and absent-mindedness. Hemp was an integral part of early Indo-European religious ceremonies for thousands of years and used for making rope and cloth, and for experiencing euphoria. Hempen sails brought the Spanish, Dutch, and British conquerors to the New World. Even in North America, hemp was so much depended on that a law was passed in Massachusetts, in 1639, requiring every household to plant hemp seed. Other early states also found hemp to be important. In Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, hemp was even used as a monetary unit.

Marijuana had its day of glory in the 1960s. Casual use was widespread, mainly among college students, who saw it as a way to protest against the political and social " establishment." But, unlike times before, there is a new threat that needs to be dealt with. For the past forty decades, the argument has mainly been whether or not to legalize hemp as a drug, but now leaders are beginning to see hemp for its medical uses, its economic benefits and as a strong industrial product.

There is no doubt that marijuana can be a harmful substance if misused. It can cause damaging short and long-term problems including effects on the reproductive health of men and women. The use of marijuana declined in the decades following the '60s, but there is evidence that it is making a huge comeback-and with a dangerous difference. A 1993 survey conducted by the University of California found that more than twelve percent of the eighth graders had tried marijuana at some time in their lives, and nearly five percent had used it in the previous thirty days. Among tenth graders, 24 percent tried it at least once and more than 10 percent in the previous thirty days. Among seniors, more than 35 percent had tried it and nearly sixteen percent had used it in the past thirty days (Ravage 6). A researcher affiliated with the study said,

“ It seems as though more and more students are trying marijuana and the problem is just getting worse. Due to consistent exposure to the drug, in schools or, in some instances, at home, many students are feeling their first euphoric sensation by the age of thirteen. Knowing this proves to be very frightening to parents who try to keep their child away from harmful substances.” (7)

With these numbers increasing, the federal government is trying to stop at nothing to prevent people from having access to marijuana.

For thousands of years, hemp fibers have been used to make many different kinds of fabric including clothing and rope. Even big companies like Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Disney have been testing the waters and offering some hempen products to the market. Not only can hemp fibers be used to make fabric; a 1938 Popular Mechanics article states that hemp can be used to manufacture over 25, 000

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products-ranging from cellophane to dynamite; and a 1916 U. S. Department of Agriculture bulletin calculated that over twenty years, one acre of hemp would yield as much pulp for paper as 4. 1 acres of trees (Barry 22).

Contrary to the belief of many people, the supply of wood for papermaking is not inexhaustible. As early as 1916, the federal government understood that the trees were running out; Bulletin 404 recommended the cultivation of hemp as an alternative source of fiber for papermaking. The USDA figured out that the supply of trees could barely last a century. We can see the logging industry fading away because all the easily-obtained trees have been taken, and there aren't that many left to harvest (" Tree Free Paper" 15).

Even now in the Pacific Northwest, economies are suffering due to the decreasing amount of trees available. Their state governments are asking, " Could common hemp, more famed for its smokability than its fiber in recent decades, help us out of our economic doldrums?" (Wood Technology 8)

Similarly, Kentucky Officials are facing another type of economic problem, but with a different substance. Tobacco is the state's leading cash crop, with yearly revenues in excess of \$700 million. In 1994, farmers reaped 14% less tobacco than in 1984. And according to recent investigations, the future for the tobacco market is dim. Higher taxes on cigarettes, declining numbers of smokers, corporate flight, and the possible collapse of special government price protection spell imminent disaster for small tobacco harvesters. One man has staked his political career on the ability of the hemp plan to rejuvenate Kentucky's tobacco. Gatewood Galbraith has for years been a supporter for the legitimacy of the hemp plant. Campaigning in his Hempmobile, a 1980 Mercedes Benz fueled by hemp seed oil, Galbraith has caused a great stir with Kentucky political leaders and has convinced them

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to consider a task force to study the viability of hemp as a cash crop.

Galbraith believes that if Kentucky is the first state to legalize hemp, it could establish a near-monopoly and give the economy a much-needed boost (Charpentier 19).

Marijuana has also been found to be valuable in its medicinal uses.

Beginning in the 1980s, renewed interest in the therapeutic qualities of marijuana prompted many medical researchers to study the possible effects of its use as an antibiotic. The only authorized medical use of marijuana by the Food and Drug Administration arises in the case of chemotherapy. The main chemical found in marijuana, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), seems to help relax the symptoms for patients who experience extreme nausea and vomiting that occur with chemotherapy. Although it's far from being a final cure, marijuana also helps relieve pressure caused by the eye disease and glaucoma. Research also indicates that short-term smoking of marijuana has improved breathing in some asthma patients. Also, muscle spasms are relieved when patients with muscle disorders take marijuana. In England, it has been used as an anti-depressant, and in South Africa, women smoke marijuana to ease the pain of child-birth (Mason 48). Hemp, if legalized, can make the lives of ill people a lot easier by helping to reduce the symptoms of their disease.

Not only are people beginning to see hemp for its industrial and medical use, they are seeing it as a way to possibly help reduce their taxes. A study was done by the University of California in 1992 concerning the potential tax revenues resulting from the speculated legalization of marijuana. Michael R. Caputo, associate professor of agriculture at the university, calculates that in 1991, with the Drug Enforcement Agency's estimated figures of \$120.94 per

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ounce, the total retail value of the marijuana would have been between \$5.09 and \$9.09 billion, had the marijuana trade been legalized and federally taxed (Barry 24).

Since the beginning of the 60s and the “hippie” movement, government agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, have made presses against hemp use. Their primary concern being that marijuana causes harmful effects to people who smoke it. Now the idea is in the minds of American citizens that marijuana is a bad thing, something that shouldn't be a part of our society. What people need to realize is that the percentage of people who use marijuana has decreased over the last few decades. Now, due to the alternative movement and a sense of needing to rebel, many teenagers have again taken up the habit of smoking marijuana.

Millions of dollars are being spent to rid our country of marijuana. Officials feel that the “high” that marijuana gives people can be dangerous, especially to teenagers. But now, with our country's economy and natural resources suffering, many pro-hemp companies can turn to the government and demand an explanation. Alcohol is legal and has no significant industrial value at all and has been proven to cause an equal amount or more damage than marijuana, so why isn't hemp legalized? There is no disputing that hemp is a valuable industrial, medical and economic resource. With hemp being so versatile in its uses, it's hard to say that we can't “milk it for what it's worth.” It offers too many advantages for the health of our people and economy to turn away. It is past time to stop these petty discussions about getting “high” and understand the value of hemp. Marijuana should be

legalized, but not for smoking or any other way to experience euphoria, but to use it for its practical purposes. We need to use it to replenish our forests, help spark dying economies in many states, and at least to help comfort our ailing citizens. The marijuana drug issue is a big problem that needs to be stamped out, but the laws aren't managing to do it. As written in USA Today, 1. 3 million teenagers smoked marijuana last year. " Anyone who thinks we've licked the drug problem in this country is living in a fantasy land," said Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, whose department conducted the survey for the University. " We should legalize hemp to be used for its practical purposes."

Throughout its history hemp has been very useful and important for a better way of living. It has proven to be a valuable asset to our economy, industry and medical and is something that cannot simply be brushed away. Although there are many people that abuse it, they are far many more people that can benefit from its legalization. Hemp needs to be seen as a help, not a hindrance.

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