

Global News

Original url: <http://globalnews.ca/news/1495511/hemp-production-on-the-rise/>

Hemp production on the rise



By **Blake Lough** Videographer Global News

1

626

168

more



An old crop with some new applications has drawn attention among Alberta farmers. Since 1998, the year growing low THC hemp was made legal, farming of the crop has been building steam. Now, it's poised to become a noticeable crop in Southern Alberta.

As the manager of the agricultural research company, Farming Smarter, Ken Coles studies the latest farming innovations. He has set up a plot of hemp crops on his own farm to better understand how to maximize harvesting efficiency. "We've got ten different types of hemp

varieties that we're looking at. We're looking at how they perform in a Southern Albertan environment."

He's doing this research in anticipation of a surge of hemp production in the area. "Recently there was a company called Manitoba Harvest that contracted an additional 20,000 acres of hemp in Southern Alberta," says Coles. "So the demand now for production information is great enough that we felt it was important to start doing some agronomic based research."

Manitoba Harvest develops natural and organic hemp-based food products; from hemp hearts to be sprinkled on salads or other foods to things like beverages and protein powders. "Hemp food products taste very good," says Clarence Shwaluk, Director of Farm Operations with the company. "And they're good for you, with the omega profiles. We know there is a strong demand for health food products and hemp fits exactly into that sort of demand."



Hemp hearts are a popular and healthy food product.

Right now hemp is being harvested for it's hearts, which is the grain portion of the crop. But the durable fibre in the stock has plenty of applications as well. "There's multiple uses. Things like 'hempcrete' that's using hemp fibre to have a recyclable, lightweight concrete

that has an insulation factor. There's just endless uses for basically a renewable resource in Canada."

That's why research is continuing. Farmers in the area are not yet equipped to capitalize on the full potential of hemp products, although development of a processing facility that will make use of the stocks is underway. Right now, the growth of the health food industry is still alluring enough to get farmer's attention. "It is very profitable, so growers that are good at growing specialty crops they can realize some very good returns with producing hemp," says Shwaluk.

With so much interest from local farmers, and a growing market demand for hemp, be prepared to see a lot more of the crop in Alberta fields. Ken Coles is confident farmers will be answering the call to grow. "The innovative farmers are always wanting to be the first to grow something new and develop their skills so they can take advantage of the opportunities that are there before they're gone."