http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/hemp-farmer-wisc-s5.jpg



When a AG memo muddies the waters on the possession and distribution of CBD oil, local Ag officials, hemp growers and farm groups move to clarify the issue. Wisconsin used to be a leader in hemp production and many farmers are hoping to make us a leader again.

RIVER FALLS, WI - Abbie Testaberg is a soon-to-be Wisconsin hemp farmer. She and her husband will be planting, growing, harvesting and processing hemp this year at the Kinni Hemp Company near River Falls. They are among the many farmers who received a license to grow hemp this year.

Two children with chronic conditions led Abbie to learn more about hemp and the oil extracted from the hemp plant called cannabidiol or CBD oil.

CBD oil is used for many purposes. There is evidence the oil helps those with autism, Parkinson's Disease and Multiple Sclerosis. A few years ago, parents of children suffering from severe seizures lobbied lawmakers to eliminate the legal gray area so they could use CBD oil to help control seizures.

Farmers recognize the value of hemp and are eager to expand their farming practices.

Last fall, in a bill that unanimously passed through the Legislature, Wisconsin created the

Industrial Hemp Pilot Research Program. According to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the state received 368 applications for hemp growing or processing licenses. This is the first growing season for hemp. According to the National Council of State Legislatures, 38 states allow farmers to grow hemp.

Just as farmers were gearing up for planting, the Wisconsin Attorney General (AG) issued a memo saying the possession and distribution of CBD oil was illegal.

“Scared us beyond belief,” Abbie confided. The family already invested in a 4-acre outdoor field and created a separate building for an indoor hydroponic system.

“[We are using the farm] as a showcase facility for our system,” she told me. Abbie’s husband Jody created a proprietary technology to grow plants indoors. The couple intended the indoor/outdoor plots as a research project to highlight the differences between the two growing systems. The family is working with a local farmer and collaborating with two University of Wisconsin-River Falls professors on hemp research.

Abbie’s long-term goal is to manufacture the trays used for indoor growing out of hemp. She told me only four or five companies in the world produce the type of plastic from hemp she needs for the growing trays.

Short term, Abbie and her husband plan to grow and harvest hemp plants for CBD oil. Processing the oil from the plant is a time-consuming, detailed process but provides a high-value product much in demand. Not being able to process the plant and extract CBD oil would have thrown a huge monkey wrench in their plans.

Abbie’s reaction to the AG’s opinion? “That’s a bunch of bananas. I spent a long week after the DOJ announcement, reading and re-reading the bill, the CBD bill, the farm bill, the hemp bill. There was a clear mechanism [for processing CBD oil].”

Abbie’s research along with the efforts of the lead Republican authors, Agriculture officials and members of the Farm Bureau, caused AG Brad Schimel to change his original position. He

announced that farmers who process CBD oil would not be prosecuted.

The Wisconsin hemp law, Act 100, clearly states processing hemp is legal. But those who buy CBD oil seem to still be in a legal gray area.

“I’m confident this is legal but the [administrative] rules don’t fully articulate the bill language,” Abbie said. “The local co-ops will be worried.”



Wisconsinites can buy CBD oil without going to a doctor for a certificate, as it should be. CBD oil is a supplement, like ginseng.

Wisconsin farmers are hurting. Dairy prices are well below the cost of production and other commodity prices seem locked in the basement. A late planting season as a result of late April snow and May rains has farmers worried.

The USDA forecasts this year’s net farm income in real dollars will drop over 8% from 2017. If realized, this forecast would be the lowest real-dollar level since 2002.

Hemp is a bright spot in a gloomy agriculture economy. For many years, Wisconsin was a leader in hemp production. With our climate, farm support system and ingenious farmers we can again rise to become a leader.

It’s time for the state to get out of the way and let farmers grow and process hemp. If you want to help make Wisconsin hemp history, you can volunteer to help Abbie plant the first hemp crop May 31 through June 2. Learn more at the Kinni Hemp Company Facebook page.