

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Sept 28, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Vote Hemp and the Hemp Industries Association (HIA), the nation's leading hemp grassroots advocacy organization and industry trade group, respectively, each working to revitalize industrial hemp production and processing in the U.S., are excited to report that Governor Jerry Brown has signed SB 566, the California Industrial Hemp Farming Act. After moving smoothly through the California legislature with strong bi-partisan support, this landmark legislation has now become California law.

Introduced by Senator Mark Leno earlier this year, SB 566 ensures that California is prepared to begin registering hemp farmers once the federal government has given states the green light. The California Industrial Hemp Farming Act will establish a framework for farming the oilseed and fiber varieties of the plant, which are used in a myriad of everyday consumer products, including food, body care, clothing, paper, auto parts, composites, building materials, and bio-fuels. Enforcement and oversight of hemp production would be conducted in concert with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and county agricultural commissioners, as is done with other crops.

"SB 566 demonstrates the real momentum behind the national movement to legalize industrial hemp," said Eric Steenstra, Executive Director of the Hemp Industries Association. "With Congressional bills to legalize hemp currently in both the House and Senate, California is on the cutting edge, pushing forward with an industrial hemp law that would not only stimulate much needed growth in local business and farming sectors, but ultimately lead the nation toward a federal policy change that would open hemp cultivation to hemp farmers around the country. This will lower our dependence on Canada

and
China

for hemp imports, and empower our agrarian and manufacturing economies to finally tap into one of the fastest growing natural products in the market."

"With the signing of this bill, California is poised to grow industrial hemp when the federal government gives states the green light," said Senator Leno, D-San Francisco

. "In the past year, the conversation to legalize the cultivation of hemp has gained momentum at the federal level, and it is only a matter of time before a farmer's right to grow hemp is restored. Hemp, which is already found in hundreds of consumer products manufactured in our state, is a perfect crop for California

. It has great potential to revitalize family farms, create new jobs and stimulate the economy."

Strong support for the bill has come from The California Sheriffs Association, individual county sheriffs, family and organic farmers, environmental organizations, labor unions, and businesses statewide. 2 Vote Hemp and HIA believe that hemp farming registrations could be accepted as soon as 2014 based on the recent memo from Deputy Attorney General James Cole of the Department of Justice. "Before farmers can begin planting hemp under SB 566, the state will need to seek clarification from federal officials that state regulations for hemp farming meet the requirements outlined in the recent memo issued by Deputy Attorney General

James Cole

," notes Vote Hemp Director

Patrick Goggin

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Today, more than 30 industrialized nations grow industrial hemp and export it to the United States . Hemp

is the only crop that is illegal to grow at the federal level, yet is legal for Americans to import.

Among the numerous

California

-based companies who have supported the bill are Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, makers of North America's

top-selling natural soap, and Nutiva, a rising star among innovative health food companies. Both of these businesses currently must import hemp from other countries. The passage of SB 566 sends a strong message to

Washington

that the time has come to change federal policy regarding industrial hemp.

"Hemp grown right here in California would stimulate massive growth in the food, body care, textiles, building and other crucial sectors that suffer from having to import less efficient materials in lieu of this lucrative industrial crop," says David Bronner

, President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps. "The nationwide movement to legalize industrial hemp and farm it right here in the US to benefit American business is growing, and SB 566 opens a door to incredible opportunity for farmers who seek sustainable agriculture, ecologically responsible businesses and products. Ultimately, this bill will help end the prohibition on what is one of the most versatile and environmentally revolutionary industrial crops on the planet."

"Nutiva looks forward to buying hemp from American farmers," says John Roulac, President of Nutiva. "This will add American jobs and reduce our fuel consumption."

California businesses currently spend millions of dollars each year importing hemp primarily from Canada, China, and Europe. Demand for hemp products has been growing rapidly in recent years, and it is estimated that the U.S. hemp market now exceeds \$500 million in annual retail sales. From natural soaps to healthy foods, there are a large variety of "Made in California" hemp products whose manufacturers and buyers will greatly benefit from an in-state source of hemp seed, fiber, and oil.

The environmental and agricultural benefits are not limited to the versatility of uses. Industrial hemp is an excellent rotation crop because its dense growth smothers weeds without herbicides and helps to break the disease cycle. Hemp requires less water and agricultural inputs than other crops, has deep tap roots that leave the soil in excellent condition for the next crop, and is proven to increase yields. These benefits save farmers money and reduce the amount of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers that run into our waterways.

Vote Hemp is a national, single-issue, non-profit organization dedicated to the acceptance of and a free market for low THC industrial hemp and to changes in current law to allow U.S. farmers to once again grow this agricultural crop. More information about hemp legislation and the crop's many uses may be found at www.VoteHemp.com

or www.TheHIA.org

Written by Australian Business

. *Video footage of hemp farming in other countries is available upon request by contacting Ryan Fletcher at 202-641-0277 or ryan@votehemp.com*

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