The new Farm Bill, which was signed by President Obama February 7 in East Lansing, Michigan, contains an amendment that would legalize the industrial production of hemp in certain parts of the United States. The amendment, authored by Reps. Jared Polis (CO), Thomas Massie (KY) and Earl Blumenauer (OR), does not out-right legalize growing hemp, which is still illegal according to federal law. The amendment does, however, allow for hemp to be grown in states where the cultivation of hemp is already legal. State agriculture departments, colleges, and universities in these states can now grow and conduct research on the crop without fear of federal prosecution.

So far, only roughly one-fifth of states have laws allowing for industrialized hemp cultivation: California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, West Virginia, and Vermont. However, the 2014 legislative season has seen industrial hemp legislation introduced in thirteen additional states: Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The states that currently allow hemp cultivation can now begin research on the crop, which can be used for a wide variety of products such as food, textiles, paper, carpeting, housing insulation, auto parts, and body-care supplements. Since the cultivation of hemp has been outlawed for decades, the federal government does not have an official value of U.S. hemp-based products. However, hemp products themselves are not illegal and the Hemp Industries Association (HIA) estimates that the total U.S. retail value of hemp products, mostly imported from Canada, was nearly $500 million in 2012.

In a press release issued following the signing of the Farm Bill, Rep. Thomas Massie, co-author of the amendment, expressed his thoughts on the new Farm Bill provision: “Our amendment paves the way for production of industrial hemp by first allowing America's academic and research institutions to demonstrate that hemp and the products derived from hemp present a great economic opportunity for our country.” Rep. Jared Polis, another co-author of the amendment had this to say of the amendment: “This will invigorate our thriving market for this historic and versatile crop, creating jobs in industries from agriculture to food service.” As states begin to conduct research into this multi-purpose crop, CSG will continue to monitor the economic and industrial impact of hemp production in the states where cultivation is legal.
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