Wisconsin legislators have ended a decades-long prohibition on the cultivation of industrial hemp with the hope of opening new economic opportunities for the state’s farmers. Gov. Scott Walker signed SB 119 in November after it received unanimous support in the state House and Assembly.

As part of the new law, the state’s Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection will create a pilot program to study the growth, cultivation and marketing of industrial hemp. (Under current federal law, only pilot programs are allowed.) Lawmakers gave the state agency 90 days to develop a system for licensing growers and setting fees.

In the 2014 farm bill, the U.S. Congress gave state departments of agriculture and post-secondary research institutions the authority to cultivate industrial hemp for research purposes. State legislatures (including Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Nebraska in the Midwest) then began passing measures to establish pilot programs and/or licensing rules. North Dakota’s statute dates back to 2007 and was the first of its kind in the country. That state is now entering its third year of a pilot program; 70 acres of hemp were planted in 2016 and more than 3,000 acres in 2017.

By:
Thursday, January 25, 2018 at 11:42 AM

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Midwest | Wisconsin | industrial hemp | laws | Agriculture