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## Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

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## Hemp an up-and-coming crop in Manitoba

Hemp is a relatively small crop in Manitoba, but it is expected to nearly double in size this year – from 14,732 acres planted in 2013 to approximately 25,000 acres in 2014.

Legal in Canada since 1998, the first Manitoba hemp crops were grown in research facilities such as Roblin's Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation (Parkland). Diversification centres connect producers, industry and academics. They perform variety and production trials to give Manitoba producers the information they need to make informed decisions about new crops.

### Hemp research in Manitoba

Some of the leading national research on hemp yields and quality is done in Manitoba. Spearheading the project is Jeff Kostuik, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's diversification specialist at Parkland.

"Parkland sends hemp seed across Canada and collects data to evaluate both grain and fibre," says Kostuik. "Last year, about 64,000 acres of hemp were grown in Canada and this year, we expect to see that number reach about 90,000 acres. Our goal is to find the most profitable way for producers to grow hemp."

Parkland is currently testing different hemp varieties for fibre quality, grain quality and height. The test sites are located in Arborg, Carberry, Melita and Roblin. Some hemp varieties have been more successful in particular regions, which is very useful information for a producer considering his or her next year's hemp crop.

"The first hemp crops that came to Manitoba were varieties from Europe," says Kostuik. "We worked with hemp breeders from across Canada to get varieties that we could test in different regions of Manitoba."

### Benefits of hemp

Hemp is a dual-purpose crop, grown for both its grain and fibre production. Part of the work of the diversification centre is to find varieties that suit both industries.

Producers who are only growing hemp for its grain prefer shorter crops, while producers growing it for fibre prefer a taller crop. Producers who would like to use both may want to plant a variety that grows to a medium height.

"Hemp oil is receiving attention for its potential health attributes," says Kostuik. "It is high in omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. We are also finding varieties that are high in gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) which also may have benefits for heart health. As the hemp industry grows, we expect more research will be done to discover its qualities."




### A growing industry

Using biomaterials to create everyday products such as clothes, cars and planes is becoming more and more popular. Automobile manufacturers, for example, use biomaterials to reduce the overall weight of their vehicles to improve fuel efficiency. The hemp fibre industry in North America is still in its infancy but is expected to expand in the coming years. Staff at diversification centres are working to find the best varieties and growing conditions for this versatile crop, while ensuring it is profitable for producers and processors.



Manitoba Harvest's Will Wellborn and Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation's Jeff Kostuik talk hemp at PCDF's 2013 field

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"There is a hemp processing facility in Emerson and a new facility just opened in Gilbert Plains," says Kostuik. "These facilities are an important step in making hemp fibre production viable in Manitoba."

### Producer perspective

Rod Fisher is a director on Parkland's board and a hemp producer in the Dauphin region. He began growing hemp in 1998, starting with only 40 or 50 acres. Today he grows 1,500 to 1,600 acres, about 25 to 30 per cent of his total land.

"We've found hemp is one of the most profitable crops out there," says Fisher. "Crops we plant after hemp are better drained, as hemp roots open up the soil and improve internal drainage."

That being said, he has had some challenges. Minor alterations to his combine helped reduce one of the most common problems associated with hemp, which is the tough fibre wrapping inside the combine. The friction can damage the machine or even cause a fire.

"The diversification centres in Manitoba are one of the main sources of information about hemp," says Fisher. "Hemp growers across the country will go to them for statistics about hemp seeding rates, chemical rates, harvest times, yield comparisons, varieties and more."

### Find out more

To find out more about the expanding hemp industry in Manitoba contact Jeff Kostuik at 204-773-8178 in Roblin. You can ask for a copy of the Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation annual report which details current hemp trials and past results.

Parkland's research is funded in part by *Growing Forward 2*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

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