

# The Modern Hemp Industry Comes of Age

■ BY MARI KANE

It's hard to believe that the modern hemp industry is over 20 years old.

When I started publishing the bimonthly newsletter, *HempWorld – The International Hemp Journal*, in 1994 there were only a couple dozen hemp companies in the nascent industry to write about.

Since industrial hemp cultivation was still prohibited by the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, most hemp companies were headed by marijuana activists looking for ways to legitimize their cause. They used slogans like “Separate rope from dope” as well as the World War II gem “Hemp for Victory,” and the 1938 Popular Science cover story title “Hemp: The New Billion Dollar Crop” as historical ammunition. In the beginning, I wrote a lot about hemp history, since there was so little hemp in the present.

The first issue featured a story titled “Interview with a Hemp Entrepreneur” and was padded with historical notes and a Hemp Business Directory, which listed about 20 businesses. The second issue highlighted a big story about Jack Herer’s California

once – importation, distribution, production, retail – creating a fairly muddy field to try to work in.

In 1994, textiles were the dominant sector, most of it coming from China. The fabric was coarse, but was made softer when blended with cotton for clothing, accessories and shoes. **Crucial Creations**, **Two Star Dog** and **Hemp Traders** were early manufacturers.

Hemp paper from Europe was also being made, but it was expensive. *HempWorld* didn’t use hemp-blended paper for the cover until late 1995, when it cost \$100 per ream of 500 sheets. Good thing our run was only about 3,000.

Hemp seed was initially used to make oil-based cosmetic products like soaps, lotions and lip balm.

By 1995, food products such as **Mama Indica’s Hemp Seed Treats**, **Richard Rose’s Hemprella Cheese** and **Hempeh Burgers** and **Heavenly Hemp’s** hotcake and cookie mixes were on the market. We featured them all in our first Hemp Food Issue in November 1995.

One of the first industry groups to form was the Hemp Industries Association (HIA). When the **North American Industrial Hemp Alliance (NAIHC)** formed in 1995, wary hempsters thought these corporate CEO’s, Department of Agriculture veterans and ex-CIA directors would make good on their promise to sway government policy, though it never happened.

By 1996, Canada had started experimenting with hemp cultivation, and American hemp companies knew it would only be a matter of time before they could stop buying seeds from China and start getting cleaner, fresher seeds from Canada. When Canada legalized cultivation in 1998, **Manitoba Harvest** and **Hempola** were early growers who began producing hemp seed oil, shelled seed (or hearts) and other hemp food products.

From the outset, Europeans were more advanced than North Americans, since many EU countries had no laws barring the cultivation of hemp. The most exciting innovation at the time came from

**Chenevotte Habitat** and **Cannosome** in France, which were using hemp to create building materials and insulation.

In the U.S., the drug war continued to rage, unabated by documentation that industrial hemp and marijuana were different species of the same cannabis plant. The political game changer was passage of California’s Proposition 215, the 1996 referendum to legalize medical marijuana. Although the law did not address industrial hemp, it helped politicians and the public see the plant in a new light and heralded a new wave of hemp legislation around the country. Thus began *HempWorld’s* heyday, as our subscribers and advertisers were positioned for success.

Yet, no matter how many states legalized hemp cultivation, they were stymied by overriding federal law that prohibited it. By 1999, many hemp businesses had run out of funding, and without enough traction in the marketplace, began closing their doors. Without advertisers, I was forced to close *HempWorld*.

In 2000, the **Drug Enforcement Administration** issued a rule banning any hemp seed and oil food products that contained any amount of trace residual THC and requiring that all hemp foods be removed from store shelves. The action nearly devastated the seed-related sector. But in 2004, the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled unanimously against the DEA, saying it “cannot regulate naturally occurring THC not contained within or derived from marijuana, i.e. non-psychoactive hemp is not included in Schedule I.”

By 2014, the U.S. Agriculture Act allowed for industrial hemp farming for research and/or commercial purposes, which is being pursued in 13 states.

Among the nearly 300 members listed in the Hemp Industries Association’s web directory, I see many of the original pioneering companies not just surviving but thriving: **Dash Hemp**, the **International Hemp Association**, **Kentucky Hemp Industries**, **Santa Barbara Hemp** and **The Hemp Connection**. Even more exciting, they’re joined by many new companies I’ve never heard of. Today’s hemp industry is a far cry from the one I began reporting on 20 years ago and there’s no looking back. Hemp is here to stay. 🍃

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Hemp Initiative, which failed to get enough signatures to make the ballot. By the third issue, I did a spread on hemp fashion featuring all the designs I could find. With about 100 paid subscribers and lots of advertisers, the newsletter was on its way to becoming a magazine.

Enthusiastic “hempsters” shared the belief that hemp could make money and save the world at the same time. When their first big gathering occurred at an anniversary party for the marijuana magazine *High Times* in the spring of 1994, the atmosphere was electric. People who’d only spoken on the phone were finally meeting, and they couldn’t stop.

Soon, experienced businesspeople began jumping onto the hemp bandwagon. Some of them attempted to fill too many niches at