

Sentinel

New crop option has potential



Above: Brady Ekstrom, left, and Kyle Steuber stand in front of their industrial hemp crop on their farm in Northrop.

NORTHROP — Martin County is well-known for its soybeans and corn, but one local man said there's potential for another crop that can do just as well here: hemp. Brady Ekstrom is seeing success with his industrial hemp crop.

Ekstrom said he and his partner, Kyle Steuber, have been licensed

growers under the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for the past three years.

Ekstrom said an acquaintance of his told him about industrial hemp for CBD and that there was the potential to make quite a bit of money.

He said his family has been doing farm drainage for farmers in the area for the past few decades so he's built a relationship with them and were able to use some land near Northrop.

"When you plant it, you don't have any pesticides or herbicides to spray on it so the inputs are very low, which eliminates some risks for farmers," Ekstrom said.

The two men started doing research in 2018 to see if it would be a possibility.

"We just went for it. We didn't stick our necks out too far. We put a little money into our grow operation otherwise we haven't spent much in growing outdoors and we're proud that we didn't borrow money and we don't owe any investors," Ekstrom said.

They started growing indoors for CBD in the middle of February 2019.

"In 2019 we grew four acres outdoors and in 2020 we grew four acres more," Ekstrom said.

This year they planted two acres of a variety plot of 14 different strains of industrial hemp for fiber and grain. The crop grew tall with some stalks measuring about 15 feet tall. Just this past week they started cutting down their crop.

"We have to let it ret in the field before it can be baled out," Ekstrom said, explaining that the retting process lets it dry before being baled to prevent problems with mold.

Ekstrom stressed that industrial hemp is not marijuana. In fact hemp contains very little of the THC compound. He also said they didn't want

to grow something unless they knew they could sell it.

“We have buyers and outlets for both the fiber and grain,” Ekstrom said.

Hemp Acres, a company out of Waconia, Minnesota, will be buying their fiber and grain. Hemp fiber can be used for building materials and grain for animal feed and hemp seed oil.

“It will be a huge outlet for this crop in the future,” Ekstrom said.

Right now hemp-derived products are not allowed to be used in animal feed, though Ekstrom said there’s more protein in it.

The hemp stalk is perhaps the most usable part of the plant.

Ekstrom explained that the inside of the hemp stalk is called the hurd and when it’s chopped up into fine pieces it can be used for hempcrete, insulation or to make Oriented Strand Board products.

Ekstrom wants to raise awareness of the potential for the hemp plant in this area. He’d also like to see a processing facility set up somewhere in the area.

He said they’re the only people that he knows of in Southern Minnesota doing anything with industrial hemp, though he said there’s likely some growing indoor hemp for CBD.

“Historically this is the area where hemp fiber and grain has been grown because of our soil and our average rainfall this year. This area was predominant for producing hemp back around World War II,” said Ekstrom.

He said this year they learned that the crop is very drought-tolerant and wasn’t affected by the lack of rain.

Newsletter

Today's breaking news and more in your inbox

EMAIL ADDRESS

I'm interested in (please check all that apply)

Daily Newsletter

Breaking News

Obituaries

Are you a paying subscriber to the newspaper? *

Yes

No

SUBSCRIBE