

# HEMP & CANNABIS

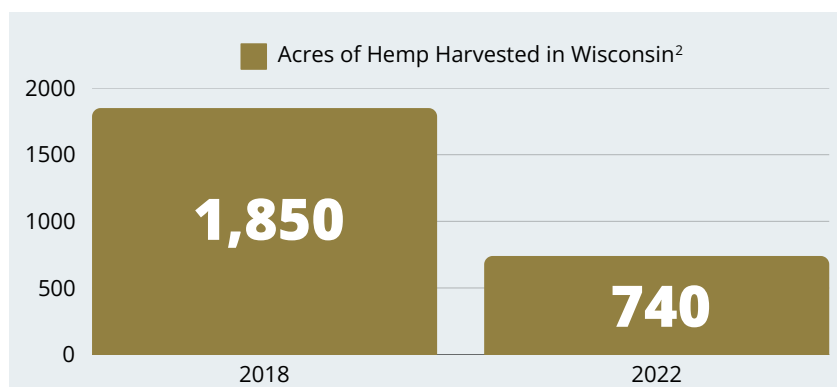
Since the production of hemp became legalized in 2018, the industrial hemp industry in Wisconsin saw a boom and then subsequent decline in number of acres harvested annually. Despite the fact that growing hemp in Wisconsin is now legal, growers still face unique challenges.

## THE ROAD TO LEGALIZATION

An industrial hemp research pilot program was developed in Wisconsin in 2016. Prior to that, industrial hemp had not been legally grown in Wisconsin since 1957, causing a lapse in infrastructure development, production experience, and state policy to support the hemp industry. Wisconsin was historically one of the nation's largest producers of hemp until it was prohibited federally in 1958.

The 2018 Farm Bill legalized hemp and directed participating states to develop industrial hemp programs under a set of federal guidelines.

Cannabis is not currently legal in Wisconsin, but in November 2022 voters in three counties and five municipalities approved non-binding referendums expressing support for the legalization of recreational cannabis. The measures were approved in the counties of Dane, Eau Claire, and Milwaukee, and the municipalities of Appleton, Kenosha, Racine, Stevens Point, and Superior.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wmtv15news.com/content/news/Walker-to-sign-bill-legalizing-hemp-farming-in-Wisconsin-461059473.html>



## HEMP

Hemp is a variation of the Cannabis sativa plant that has a THC concentration of 0.3% or less and does not produce a psychoactive effect. Hemp is cultivated to produce fiber, seeds, and flowers, which are used to extract CBD.

## CANNABIS

Cannabis is another variation of the Cannabis sativa plant that has a THC concentration of more than 0.3% and produces a psychoactive effect.

## SUPPORTING HEMP FARMING

Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) joins all major agricultural associations in the state in supporting cultivation of hemp and in adopting means to promote its infrastructure development and encourage university research to improve crop varieties and cultivation and processing techniques and to develop new end-uses for hemp.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.votehemp.com/u-s-hemp-crop-report/>; USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture

## WFU'S HEMP & CANNABIS POLICY

### ***Hemp Licenses***

A disproportionate number of people of color have been targeted, arrested, and charged with crimes related to non-violent cannabis possession and distribution, and the USDA has set hemp licensing to exclude individuals with prior drug felonies reaching back ten years. WFU supports removing the ban on individuals applying for hemp licenses that have served and completed sentencing for a nonviolent cannabis related felony.

### ***Legalization of Cannabis***

WFU supports the legalization and substantial taxation of cannabis in Wisconsin under the following conditions:

1. Growers are required to obtain a permit.
2. Each grower is limited to growing no more than a specific number of plants and/or acres.
3. Restrictions on who may grow cannabis in the state of Wisconsin are consistent with Wisconsin State Statute 182 (Wisconsin's Anti-Corporate Farming Law).

### ***Expunge Non-violent Convictions***

WFU recommends that the state retroactively expunge non-violent convictions related to cannabis.



## WHAT CAN WE DO?

### **Create a Hemp and Cannabis Division within the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP)**

Wisconsin hemp farmers face significant challenges in harvesting, drying, processing, and accessing viable markets for their crops. Establishing a dedicated division within DATCP would enable the state to provide targeted support, including market research, technical assistance, and producer-focused resources. This division could help develop market protections for hemp and cannabis while addressing critical infrastructure needs, such as facilities for drying and processing.

**Expanding opportunities for specialty crops** like hemp and cannabis is useful for Wisconsin farmers seeking to diversify marketable crop options, enhance profitability, and strengthen resilience against fluctuating commodity prices. With adequate state support, these emerging markets have the potential to benefit not only producers but also rural economies statewide.