

It’s on the shelves at Costco!

‘Whatever Happened to Hemp?’

By O’Shaughnessy’s News Service

“The hemp issue bridged the gap between the late ‘80s and the explosion of interest in medical marijuana in 1996,” said Paul Armentano, speaking for himself and many other cannabis-centric political activists. Armentano was moderating a panel discussion on the state of the hemp movement/industry at the 41st annual meeting of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, held in Los Angeles in October 2012.

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Armentano, 40, a NORML deputy director, said it was Jack Herer’s book *The Emperor Wears No Clothes* that alerted him and countless other pot partisans to the suppressed uses of cannabis as food and fiber. “I thought hemp was going to be the game-changer,” he recalled. “And here we are talking about marijuana law reform, about legalization and taxing a legal cannabis market, about the therapeutic potential of marijuana... But what happened to the enthusiasm about hemp?”

The panelists were David Bronner, CEO of Doctor Bronner’s Magic Soap, author/organizer Chris Conrad, attorney/lobbyist Patrick Goggin, *High Times* editor Rick Cusick, and State Assemblyman Chris Norby, a Republican from northern Orange County.

Norby had supported the Industrial Farming Act introduced by State Senator Mark Leno, which passed the legislature in 2011 but was vetoed by Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat, just as previous hemp bills had been vetoed by his Republican predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Norby said with a quiet edge of outrage that among the anti-hemp lobbyists, “You had the Narcotics Officers Association and the other law enforcement unions talking about how all these hemp plants will hide the real marijuana and the narcotics officer driving down the country roads wouldn’t see it... Of course the pollen doesn’t mix and you can’t grow these plants together.”

Governor Brown had claimed that by vetoing the hemp bill he was protecting California farmers from doing something illegal under federal law. “It was vetoed,” said Norby, “but I’m sure it will come back and perhaps the governor may have a different view.”

California’s assembly map was redrawn last year and Norby said to the NORML crowd, “I’m in a close race now against an opponent who has the support of the law enforcement lobby.” We’re sorry to report that he didn’t win. He seemed like a principled, anti-war libertarian.

Cusick of *High Times* said of hemp, “I used to care but things have changed.” His ardor cooled, he recalled, “the first time a hempster told me (in a scolding tone), ‘It’s not dope, it’s rope.’” Cusick’s expectation of a huge market developing for hemp clothing was unfulfilled, he said, “because the price point never came down to the comfort point.”

Chris Conrad, who worked with Herer on the 1990 edition of *The Emperor Wears No Clothes*, and later brought out a book of his own, *Hemp: Lifeline to the Future*, also recalled his optimism about the political appeal of hemp. “We were about saving the world and creating jobs,” he said about the political organizing he did in that era.

When his grandmother, who was anti-marijuana, first heard Conrad talking about hemp, she said, very positively, “Oh I remember hemp,” and a conversation ensued. Conrad thought widespread public accep-

ance was around the corner.

He was critical of European farmers who took government subsidies to grow hemp and didn’t produce crops that were economically viable. “To them it was a money crop, not an industrial crop,” he said. When the subsidies were pulled, they planted other things.

Why not ‘push the envelope?’

Armentano remarked the parallels between the legal status of hemp cultivation in the U.S. today (approved by 17 states despite federal prohibition) and medical marijuana (ditto). Regarding medical use, he pointed out, “states have developed pragmatic models for producing and distributing the plant... So why haven’t some of these states pushed the envelope with the federal government over hemp?”

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David Bronner provided the answer: “With medical marijuana you have a relatively small number of plants and you have people in life-and-death situations, or a huge increase in personal well-being at stake.” Thus the motivation to commit civil disobedience is high for many, and the stakes are low compared to the farmer planting acres of industrial hemp who would put in thousands of plants and face multiple life sentences for doing so. “There’s no point in growing 12 or 99 industrial hemp plants. That would make a few bottles of our soap,” Bronner said.

Bronner pointed out that hemp had penetrated the market, not as fiber — as per initial expectations — but as a nutritious oil. He reiterated its selling points: “Hempseed oil contains an ideal balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-3s are systematically deficient in the American diet. Doctors recommend fish oil and flax supplements... Hemp doesn’t contain the mercury, PCBs and other environmental toxins now found in fish...”

“It’s gone into the mainstream. Hempseed is now on every store shelf in America. We’ve got hemp in Costco now. It’s everywhere. Every single German automobile on the road is made with a biocomposite of hemp fiber and polypropylene (*rapping his briefcase*.)”

Retail sales in the U.S. of products containing hemp exceeded \$450 million in 2011. The current wave of commercial success was made possible, Bronner said, by the Hemp Industry Association’s successful legal resistance in 2001 when the Drug Enforcement Administration moved to ban all hempseed imports. In 2004 the 9th Circuit Court of Appeal ruled in *HIA v. DEA* that the agency did not have jurisdiction over seeds with only trace amounts of THC.

The judges later awarded Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap some \$21,000 in legal fees —but their actual outlay had been close to \$200,000. Commercial momentum was lost as retailers were reluctant to stock hempseed products until their legality was confirmed. Now, with demand established and growing, U.S. companies are processing, packaging and distributing hempseed products profitably, but U.S. farmers are still denied the right to cultivate the plant.

Bronner described the ad his company took last year in *O’Shaughnessy’s* and *West Coast Leaf* showing Hu Jintao, then president of China, looking pleased as he visits a hemp fiber mill. The Chinese government is investing millions of dollars in their hemp industry. Plans call for planting more than two million hectares. “America, get with the program!” said the ad.

Bronner said he recently had an encour-



AN ACT OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN FRONT OF THE WHITE HOUSE was performed June 11, 2012, by David Bronner, CEO of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap. In a locked steel cage to prevent interruption by police, he harvested seeds from hemp plants and pressed oil which he distributed on French bread to passersby and the media. Bronner, a fifth-generation soap maker whose company imports more than 20 tons of hemp oil annually from Canada, acted on behalf of American farmers prohibited by federal law from growing hemp. He declared that he was making a “beer bet” with President Obama, and would do the buying if law enforcement found the plant to contain more than 0.3 percent THC. “The Obama position on hemp is not science-based or good for the U.S. economy,” Bronner said.



aging conversation with Rand Paul’s chief-of-staff, and that the junior Senator from Kentucky, a Republican, “wants to make this his issue.” Paul and Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkeley (Democrats from Oregon) and Bernie Sanders (Independent from Vermont) have introduced a hemp bill. According to Bronner, Paul “is going to really push the Senate. Rand Paul is all about hemp. He’s a rock star on the Republican side.”

It doesn’t matter how many states pass industrial hemp bills, Bronner reiterated. “What we’ve lacked is a champion at the federal level... All that needs to happen is a policy change from the executive branch —DOJ saying that hemp grown pursuant to state law is fine.

“That’s why Obama has been so disappointing. As a state senator in Illinois he voted twice for industrial hemp farming.”

Cusick questioned Bronner’s decision to push for legalizing industrial hemp without reference to the medical and recreational uses of the plant. “I’m all about legalization,” Bronner responded. “But hemp has a coalition of conservative farmers who want nothing to do with pot. We have businessmen who are anti-marijuana.” Bronner expressed appreciation for support from Arran Stephens the founder of Nature’s Path Granola, in blocking the DEA’s effort to ban hempseed. “He is strongly anti-marijuana and strongly pro-hemp.”

“The big breakthrough we need is the cottonization of hemp fibers so it can run on the cotton processing infrastructure. That’s what’s been holding up hemp.”

Bronner acknowledged Cusick’s point about the prohibitive cost of hemp clothing. “The big breakthrough we need is the cottonization of hemp fibers so it can run on the cotton processing infrastructure. That’s what’s been holding up hemp. But there’s new technology being developed.”

Naturally Advanced Technology, based in Portland, Oregon, has developed a type of hemp fiber that Hanes might use in its underwear, Bronner said. “Unfortunately they’re switching to flax,” he added, “just because of the prohibition.”

China, too, is working on the cottonization of hemp fibers. “The sad history of hemp is going to reverse,” Bronner concluded.

“The overall trend is looking for natural-fiber alternatives to synthetic fibers. Many crops will grow in importance, but especially hemp because it doesn’t have to compete with food crops —it is a food crop. There’s huge potential in hemp. It’s not happening as fast as everyone thought, but it will happen.”

Retro Russian Relief

Dr. Sergey Grigoriyev was the hit speaker at the Hemp Industry Association meeting in San Francisco Nov. 12. Grigoriyev is the Leading Scientific Researcher at the Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry in St. Petersburg —Russia’s premier seedbank.

He gave a slide presentation about his collection of *Cannabis* varieties in Russia and described the extensive support the Vavilov Institute has already given to breeding efforts around the world. He also spoke of the present day efforts to collect seed varieties. Every accession has now been tested for cannabinoid content and essential fatty acids in the seeds.

Grigoriyev knows the world wants CBD-rich varieties and has many candidates to contribute to a breeding program. The first few years of this program could be done under contract in Russia.

The most surprising thing Grigoriyev said was that he wanted to contribute seeds to the U.S. Seedbank in Ft. Collins, Colorado. The offer will give the federal government an opportunity recognize the potential of hemp in a politically safe way. All they have to do is not block the import. It would certainly be in the nation’s economic and strategic interest to accept this generosity. The seeds the U.S. Seedbank accessed in the 1950s were lost through neglect. Just when our nation realizes that the hemp revolution has taken off —but our leaders have left us barren of seed— Russia, of all places, offers us a rescue.

Grigoriyev touched a nerve in the hemp crowd. Working alone, without government support, he has succeeded in preserving a unique treasure trove of Cannabis’s genetic legacy. Nutiva pledged \$10,000 per year to the research (hopefully in return for seeds someday when they are finally allowed here). Others were waiting in line to talk about contributing to the project. —Don Wirtshafter



SERGEY GRIGORIYEV