



HEMP COOPERATIVE
IRELAND — EST. 2018

Hemp Cooperative Ireland presentation to Agricultural Committee.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to you today on this important issue. I am here in my role as Chair of Hemp Cooperative Ireland, which was set up in May 2018 by myself, other farmers and interested parties. It came about because we shared a vision of the great potential for hemp cultivation in Ireland. We now have 262 shareholders, made up of farmers, processors and supporters of the industry.

We have 8 board members of various backgrounds which volunteer their time as they are passionate about the development of the industry.

In my comments today, I will set out why hemp is an important crop for Ireland, how it can be taken up across Irish agriculture and how hemp cultivation can lead to new jobs through high value products across a range of sectors including health products, food, clothing and construction. I will also touch on hemp and its environmental benefits in relation to bioremediation and adaptation to climate change and its role in the 'Just Transition' for our farming communities.

Hemp Cooperative Ireland supports farmers to access resources, equipment and markets through a national body and four regional hubs, covering the four provinces of Ireland. Increasing the amount of hemp grown here can help Ireland become a leader in carbon sequestration as we strive to meet our 2030 commitments. Hemp on average sequesters 10 tonnes of net carbon dioxide per hectare, so 10,000 Ha sown would reduce CO₂ emissions by 100,000 tonnes per annum, incredibly in a 4 month window.

Economic valuations show that on average hemp has a 39.5% higher gross margin in comparison to winter wheat. In recent years the area dedicated to hemp cultivation in the EU has increased from less than 20,000 Ha in 2015 to 35,000 Ha in 2019, a 75% increase. France is the largest producer accounting for 70% of EU production.

The hemp stalk is separated into fibre and shiv. The shiv being the woody core. The fibre is used for clothing, textiles, insulation and more recently bio-composites. The woody core of the plant is used for building products including hempcrete, fibre board and insulation. Furthermore, it is used as bedding material, biomass and paper.

The seed from the hemp plant can be used in many ways. The oil from the seed in food, body care products and technical products. The omega-6 to omega-3 ratio in hempseed oil is 3:1 which is considered to be optimal for human health.

The seed cake can be used as an animal feed rich flour which is 33.5% protein. The Department of Agriculture stated in 2014 that Ireland's and the EU's dependence on imported protein sources such as soya bean meal has initiated a legislative and political push towards the development of indigenous plant-based protein sources. There is a great opportunity to use hemp to improve this situation, considering 415,000 tonnes of soya bean meal was imported in 2020.

The leaf and flower of the plant contains many bio-active compounds suitable for health products. By developing a hemp industry in Ireland, Hemp Cooperative Ireland forecasts an immediate and lasting environmental impact, by reducing the amount of high polluting fossil fuels required for industry. Of equal importance is the potential of hemp for rural regeneration. An indigenous hemp industry has the potential to create 80,000 rural jobs according to a recent report from Teagasc. This is direct and indirect job creation and is based on the premise that legislative frameworks are put in place and that state bodies are willing to fund the industry.

For every 8.9 million euro invested in the sector, there are direct and indirect jobs created for agriculture, this will range from 200 to 400 jobs. To create 10,250 jobs annually the hemp industry would need to attract an average of 150 million euro investment each year.

Hemp Cooperative Ireland has made recent efforts to commence dialogue with state funding agencies like Enterprise Ireland and LEADER to ascertain what potential support could be available. However, our efforts have been met with resistance to date. At these early stages of trying to grow the Hemp industry in Ireland, government assistance will be a key component of the tri-party funding that will be required to help invest in machinery and infrastructures. Hemp Cooperative Ireland also intends to raise funding through a members share issue and private investment.

As we know we have a housing crisis in Ireland, and we maintain that hemp is part of the solution. Buildings are possible using hemp shiv/ lime as a replacement for concrete, not to mention a solution to retrofit older cottages. Hempcrete is CO2 absorbing, fire resistant and breathable. For example, 2 tonnes of hemp shiv will be sufficient to build an average house and will sequester 3.7 tonnes CO2.

Hemp can also retrofit our existing housing stock and there are many homes in our rural towns and villages that could benefit.

“Only 5% of Irish farmers are under 35 and 30% of farmers are over 65. Therefore, there needs to be as many incentives as possible to entice young people to become farmers and for this occupation to be a long-term source of income” (CSO, 2016).

We, as an organisation, promote hemp as a rotational crop for all farming systems. It is an ideal break crop creating an added income stream. If hemp was recognised in any carbon credit scheme it would enable a Just Transition for our rural communities. As we know we have a lot of agricultural activity on drained peatland which by its very nature is a huge contributor to carbon emissions, it is unjust to suggest that these farmers are told to rewet these lands when instead they could be offered the opportunity to grow hemp to initiate a “Just Transition”.

Hemp decontaminates soil as a natural phytoremediation crop. It promotes biodiversity as a late-flowering source of pollen for bees. Hemp grows well in organic systems and improves soil structure. It also needs no artificial fertiliser, is un-reliant on pesticides/fungicides/herbicides and increases the following crops yield by 25% while limiting the weeds and therefore reliance on spraying. We outlined our vision to the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) in more detail when we responded to their consultation call last summer. This submission was endorsed by the IFA and Irish Grain Growers Group.

Hemp fits neatly into the emerging bio-economy and is an opportunity that we should not miss but it currently cannot be supported as it is not in policy.

Closing statement

The global hemp industry is growing and Ireland is in a unique position to become a major producer in the EU. Of the major issues facing Ireland, hemp is uniquely positioned to provide part of the solution. A hemp industry supported

by the government will create green jobs in rural communities, enticing young farmers, provide an additional income stream to all farmers, helping Irish farmers and businesses meet carbon goals, while integrating into their existing farming systems.

The time to support the hemp Industry is now and Hemp Cooperative Ireland is ready to engage with the government on a national and local level. Without government support, Ireland will be left behind our EU counterparts who already have flourishing hemp Industries

Needs and barriers for the industry

- Engagement from government and local levels
- Funding
- Collaboration
- R&D (Teagasc under John Finnan spent 3 years researching hemp and there is an EIP project ongoing in Loop Head, Co. Clare called Hemp 4 soil.)
- Lack of infrastructure and support for hubs
- Legislation
- Funding / assistance
- Education around industrial hemp
- Insurance companies not wanting to cover hemp products/liability.

The benefits of using hemp/ opportunities

- Import substitution
- Rural regeneration
- Job creation (refer to Teagasc report – 80,000 jobs)
- Environment / CO2
- Soil regeneration / rotational crop
- Housing retrofits
- Plant based proteins