

## Community - Whitewater Region

# County farmer sees growth potential in hemp industry

### Stone Farms responsible for one per cent of Canada's hemp crops

**By Jake Davies**

*Cobden Sun editor*

COBDEN—After a couple years of research and one year of putting that research to practice, Stone Farms believes there's a future in hemp.

"It outperformed expectations," Stone Road farmer Reuben Stone said of his hemp crop. "I'm pretty optimistic to see where it can go."

Standing near a couple of half-filled, 100-tonne storage bins at Stone Farms on a windy Monday, Sept. 14 Mr. Stone's three-year experiment on the legal cultivation of marijuana is almost complete. The grain is in the storage bins awaiting cleaning and "the marketing end still to be done."

So far, Mr. Stone believes the process has been a success.

"It's quite east to see (hemp) might compete with corn for acres in the county - put it that way," he said.

Stone Farms has been planning the project for awhile.

"This has been in the works for about three years," Mr. Stone said.

The first two years were spent researching the project and this year was spent putting the plans in motion.

Last May the Ontario Hemp Alliance (OHA) phoned Stone Farms and asked if they were interested in growing a

said. "It germinates very easily in a dry soil."

Mr. Stone says no licensed chemicals are needed.

"We didn't apply anything," he said.

Mr. Stone says the crop does respond well to nitrogen fertilizer and there was a "noticeable difference" between the hemp that was treated and the organic hemp Stone Farms produced.

The growing of the hemp was easily managed as well.

"It's very aggressive," Mr. Stone said. "It smothered any weed that tried to compete with it."

Harvesting is a different story though and can be stressful work.

"It's difficult to tell when it's ready," Mr. Stone said. "We were one of the first in Canada to harvest our hemp. The grain is what you are harvesting and our quality looks pretty good."

The problem is the seeds can fall from the plant very easily.

"As the season progresses watching the seeds drop to the ground makes you pretty nervous," Mr. Stone said.

Mr. Stone said they used a "highly modified" combine and hired a gentleman with nine years experience harvesting hemp to do the job.

That didn't alleviate much of the stress though.

"It's difficult to maintain the

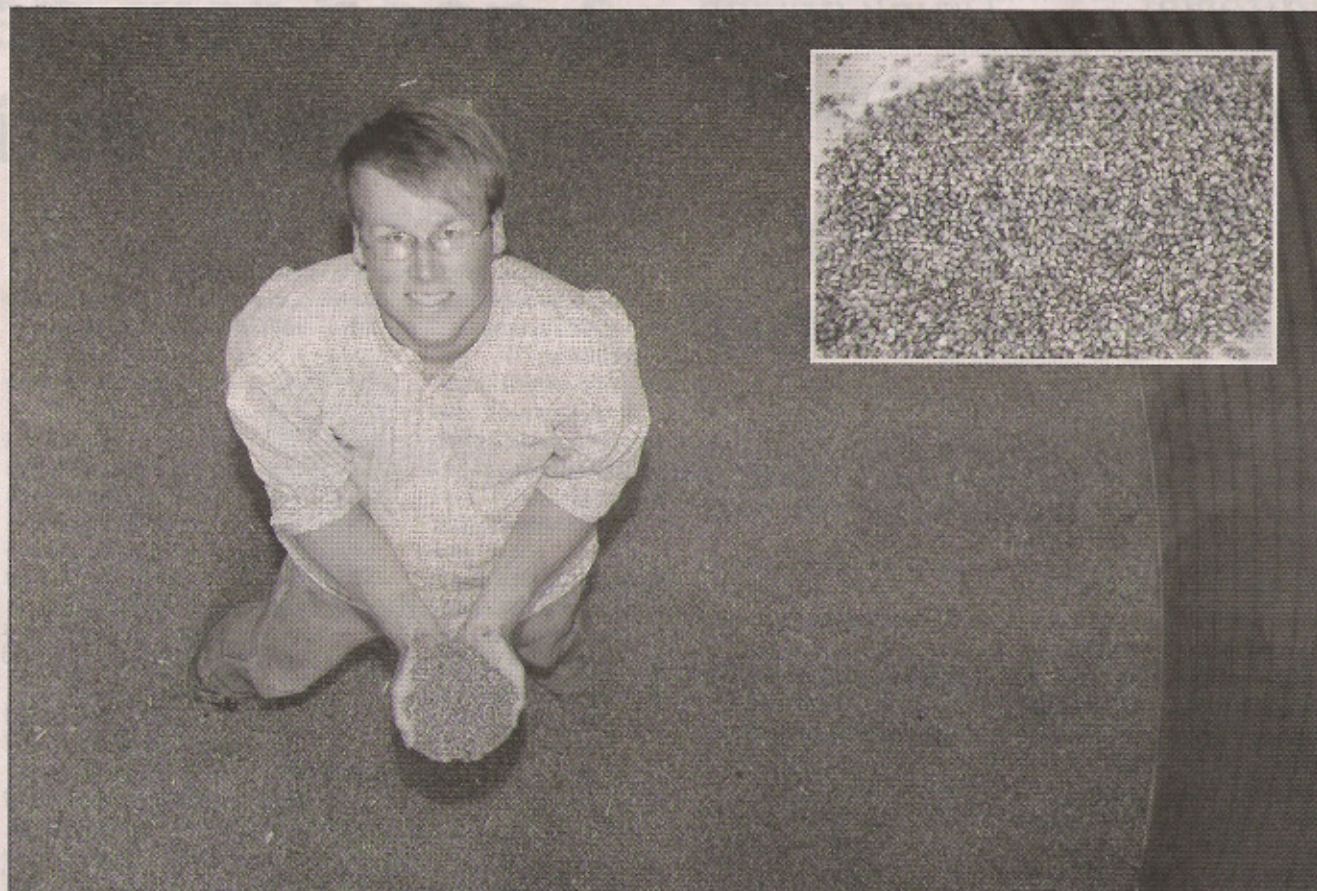


Photo by Jake Davies

**Stone Farms' Reuben Stone shows off the grain harvested from the farm's hemp crop this year. The estimated 110,000 pounds of seed will be used in food production.**

es to growing the crop in Canada.

"It's kind of a closed market because the U.S. is not allowed to grow it," Mr. Stone

said. "They can buy it as long as the seed is sterilized. The easiest way to sterilize a seed is to process it."

Mr. Stone said they did

lose a small amount of their crops to poachers but it is the poachers that are in for a bit of a surprise. Although it is nearly impossible to

tell the difference between hemp and marijuana by eye, hemp has none of the affects marijuana does if smoked or consumed.

Amance (OHA) phoned Stone Farms and asked if they were interested in growing a crop of hemp.

"By the second week of May the seeds were in the ground," Mr. Stone said.

"We swapped out 100 acres of corn. The risk-to-yield ratio made it worth it. The OHA is trying to expand the market for their crops. They were setting up a deal with their buyers and needed some suppliers. They put some incentives in place. The market right now is very small so the potential is there."

And in one summer, Stone Farms became one of Canada's largest hemp producers.

In 2009 there was about 15,000 acres of hemp grown as crop in Canada.

"Almost one per cent of the Canadian crop is here," Mr. Stone said.

Mr. Stone's entire crop is destined for food processing. The main products being oil - "a high-value product for nutrition."

The oil can be used in dressings and other products but is not considered a particularly good cooking oil.

Hemp nuts are also popular, the product can be used in ice cream such as that found in Renfrew and in milk products.

"It's all for food production and there are people looking for it from as far away as England," Mr. Stone said.

Stone Farms "works" 628 acres and "200 of that is organic."

The 107 acres devoted to hemp crops operated in a "pretty straight forward" manner.

"It's like grass," Mr. Stone

of the stress though.

"It's difficult to maintain the seed quality," he said. "The grain will heat in the combine tank and it will start to spoil within hours."

The harvesting process took about five days.

"In five days I got 12 hours of sleep," Mr. Stone said. "There's so much to do you don't really think about sleep. The stress level has taken a pretty good plummet since the crops came off. It's in the bin and I know what I got now."

Mr. Stone estimates he got about 110,000 pounds of grain off the 107 acres. When asked by the *Cobden Sun* if it was worth it he said "I'm looking for seed for next year."

We'll take that as an affirmative.

"It's much better suited to the climate here than corn," Mr. Stone said.

Hemp has had an up and down history in Canada. Following decriminalization at the end of the 90s there was big interest in the product.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm at the beginning of the decade," Mr. Stone said.

In 2002 there was a bit inventory of the grain and 34,000 acres of hemp was being farmed at its peak.

Last year there was only 6,000 to 7,000 acres being farmed for hemp.

"It's gone through a boom and bust cycle already," Mr. Stone said.

"There was over enthusiasm and a lack of knowledge. It had nothing to do with the global market."

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