

Hemp players in £1.1M research partnership to explore F&B applications

25 Mar 2021 --- Aberystwyth University, Wales, aims to make hemp a more valuable crop for Welsh hemp farming through a £1.1 million (US\$1.5 million) partnership with TTS Pharma, specialist hemp grower Voase and Son, seed distributor Elsoms Seeds and GrowPura, an expert in controlled cultivation where high levels of control are required.

Alan Gay, senior research scientist at the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth University, speaks to **NutritionInsight** about the two-year research project called Pharmhemp.

Pharmhemp aims to find out what hemp cultivars are best suited for F&B applications. "Developing these priorities depends on complex considerations, including what compounds we find and where the markets develop for various products," he details.

The partnership will further increase the amounts of compounds used to make a variety of food, cosmetic, health and pharmaceutical products, while also exploring industrial applications.

"People don't realize the sheer variety of products that hemp can produce – it's very versatile," Gay explains.



Pharmhemp aims to discover which hemp cultivars are best suited for F&B applications.

"Also, many don't appreciate that the industrial hemp strains grown in the UK are all varieties with negligible levels of the psychoactive substance tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). These are some of the misunderstandings and misconceptions that we hope to help address."

Expensive imports factored out

The project links a number of the UK's experienced hemp operators with the specialized breeding expertise at the IBERS.

A wider goal is to strengthen the domestic hemp supply chain by creating local jobs and reducing the need for expensive imports.

"It will also help eliminate the importation of illegal and non-compliant materials from China, South and North America," says Mark Tucker, CEO at TTS Pharma.

"We have been growing and processing industrial hemp since 2002, but have seen little development of the crop in the UK," adds fellow partner and industrial hemp grower Nick Voase.

"We are happy to be involved in this project which will adapt the crop to new uses and is specifically aimed at optimizing yields from UK-grown crops."

Creating local jobs

Hemp is currently used in specialized fire-resistant fabrics, mattresses, building materials, insulation, animal bedding and biofuel. An environmentally friendly material, it is seen as a crop that can replace petrochemical products.

The research will develop the crop's compounds sustainably, making them from parts of the plant that are currently left unused.

"As a result of current licensing rules, when industrial hemp is grown in the UK, only the stems are used after a process called retting, which destroys the leaves and flowers," Gay explains.

"When it is grown to produce seed for culinary purposes, the rest of the plant is not used. The parts of the plant will be sourced from enhanced harvesting techniques on farms when appropriate licenses are available."

Not so foreign after all

Recent moves in hemp F&B include Truss CBD USA's new line of [hemp-derived CBD beverages](#). In the budding cosmetics arena, Amyris acquired Terasana – a natural skincare brand – to launch a branded [clean beauty product](#) focused on sustainably sourced cannabinoids.

The aim is to make the Pharmhemp partnership more attractive to farmers who are keen to include alternative crops when rotating the use of their land. Doing so is projected to support highly skilled jobs in the west of Wales and develop new opportunities for Welsh farming.

"In trials last year, hemp grew reasonably at our site in Gogerddan. It has been grown in Wales historically, as shown by the name of a valley in southern Snowdonia 'Cwm Cywarch,' which translates as Hemp Valley."

By Anni Schleicher



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