

## Simpler regulations for hemp growers

Life for farmers planting hemp will be littler simpler in 2017, thanks to regulatory changes

By Angela Lovell

Hemp growers must obtain a licence from Health Canada each year to grow industrial hemp, but recent changes to the regulations have made the process slightly easier and more efficient. As of November 21, 2016 growers can apply for their industrial hemp cultivation licence electronically via email, which will speed up the process. A common complaint with hemp growers has been the delays in processing licences via the old “snail mail” method.

Growers will no longer have to pre-identify planting sites before obtaining a cultivation licence. Previously, growers had to identify which fields they would grow their hemp crops on when they filled out the hemp license application usually around December. Now they only need to report their field sites within 15 days of seeding which gives them more flexibility to make changes to their cropping plans.

One licence will now also cover all cultivation sites and activities, whereas in the past growers had to have multiple licenses for each location or activity. It should also reduce the need to obtain licence amendments if farmers are moving hemp from one bin to another.

A grower’s cultivation licence will now expire in March of the following year to allow the grower more time to store and sell hemp crops grown in the previous year. In the past, licences expired on December 31, and because there was often a long delay to get new license applications approved, growers storing their crop beyond January 1 could end up in violation of the regulations if their new licence was not yet approved.

There is no longer a minimum acreage requirement for industrial hemp cultivation, which was previously at least 10 acres. Although hemp growers must still undergo a criminal record check to obtain an industrial hemp cultivation licence, these will now be valid for one year from the date they are issued.

Finally, annual testing for tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) — the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis — is no longer required for most approved hemp grain and fibre crops.

THC testing is still in place for certified seed production, but the resulting grain crop will not need to go through the testing. The thinking behind this change is that certified seed varieties proven to be low in THC will continue to be low in THC for grain production. This will eliminate testing costs and paperwork for commercial growers.

The Canadian Trade Hemp Alliance says on its website that these changes “better align regulation of industrial hemp with the demonstrated low public health and safety risks of the crop. The [Section 56 Class Exemption of the Industrial Hemp Regulations] is an interim measure to simplify the license application process as the Government moves forward with its commitment to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to marijuana.”

Clarence Shwaluk, Director of Farm Operations for Fresh Hemp Foods in Winnipeg, Manitoba welcomes the changes to the regulations, which the industry has long lobbied for. “These changes help to lessen the burden for hemp growers and gives more legitimacy to the crop overall as far as being a cash crop that can be part of a regular rotation,” says Shwaluk.

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