

# Rural Vermont 2018 Hemp Survey – Results Report

## Executive Summary:

In late August and early September 2018, Rural Vermont conducted an online survey of VAAFM's registered Hemp growers and other Rural Vermont constituents who have self-identified as interested in hemp production.

Based on the 114 responses received during the three-week survey period, Rural Vermont has learned some important characteristics of the community of Vermont hemp producers and identified numerous issues, concerns, needs, and opportunities that have the potential to impact the development of hemp as an agricultural crop and product in Vermont. Rural Vermont is using the results of this survey to help guide its organizing and advocacy work in the upcoming VAAFM public rule-making process.

In addition to the quantitative responses, the comments provided in the survey demonstrate there exists a great deal of uncertainty among current and potential hemp growers about obtaining certified and stable low-THC seed, how and where to process their harvest, third party testing and quality controls, best agronomic practices for hemp, and a need to address the "gray area" of intra- and inter-state commerce of seeds and hemp derived products, especially CBD.

It is Rural Vermont's hope that the information provided here would help the VAAFM in addressing key areas of concern among Vermont's agricultural producers and accelerate the rule-making process; in order to relieve much of the uncertainty in advance of the 2019 growing season which is a top concern for those who participated in the survey.

## DEMOGRAPHICS:

**114 people responded to the survey** – 76% identified themselves as currently growing hemp with another 11% saying they plan to grow hemp soon.

**64 People** identified themselves as either "yes" or "maybe" interested in providing testimony in the VAAFM rule-making process

**90+ people** provided some type of contact information and expressed interest in staying informed and engaged

## Additional Details:

- There was a representative response from all areas of the state
- Over 50% of respondents stated they have no experience growing hemp; only 11% have 5 years or more of experience growing hemp
- 42% reported growing one acre or less of hemp; 3 respondents reported growing 10 acres or more
- 80% are growing hemp for CBD oil production; next highest were food products (33%) and seed (30%)

## Top Five Barriers Identified: *(not in priority order)*

1. Access to certified seed; especially with VT adapted genetics;
2. Centralized information and accessible technical assistance;
3. Development of and access to processing infrastructure;
4. Access to capital investment, loans and grants;
5. Adverse influence of big money investors, many from out-of-state

## Top Five Priorities for the Rule-Making Process: *(not in priority order)*

1. Creating a level regulatory playing field for all scales of growers; fair fees;
2. Access to affordable third-party testing and standards for quality control and product labeling;

3. State supported grants for research, technical assistance, and for developing in-state processing infrastructure;
4. Clear guidance from the VAAFM hemp pilot program so that Vermont hemp growers and processors remain in compliance with the intent of the 2014 Farm Bill, Sec. 7606;
5. Address, in advance of the 2019 growing season, as many of the expressed concerns as possible that would/should fall under the purview of the Vermont Hemp Pilot Program to create greater regulatory certainty

**Top Five Research Priorities:** *(not in priority order)*

1. Development of regionally specific hemp genetics (seeds and strains) for all varieties of end use products – including building and fabrication products such as hempcrete and plastics
2. Developing Best Management Practices for all the different varieties of end use
3. Identifying novel environmental services of hemp for water quality protection and improvement, carbon sequestration, etc.
4. Marketing hemp; i.e., developing value-added best practices from farm-to-market; including education, training, networking and outreach
5. Collaborate with VT's medical community to investigate ailment-specific hemp genetics and BMPs

**Excerpts from Representative Comments by Survey Participants:**

“Our family farm is in commercial production for the first time since the 1960s when regulations forced my grandfather, and many other smaller dairy farms, out of business. This is such a huge opportunity for small farms.”

“Without a lawful way to process all the acres of hemp being grown, there is a gray area bottleneck in the processing and analytics space. The VT hemp economy will need processors and analytics labs to handle the flow. The current law doesn't address this at all.”

“I'd like to see comprehensive lists of processors and wholesalers” *(numerous similar comments provided)*

“...My greatest concern is that ecological ag. practices will not play a role in hemp production. Though this is the first year, I can't help but consider what type of soil inputs have been applied, what does a rotation look like (if any), and what are the levels of residual pesticides from previous crops that the plants will uptake and transfer into the medicine or fiber. What education is being provided to more traditional farmers that could steer them into utilizing ecological systems thinking to develop a diverse soil biome for their crop...”

“I would like to see ....rule making (for hemp processors) that would allow for: transportation of crops, extraction facilities that are allowed to remove THC and either destroy it or sell it to the Medicinal program, (and) required third party testing. “

“Need more information on nutrient requirements. Also, hemp-specific machinery would be very helpful as well” *(numerous similar comments provided)*.

“I would like to see clearer rules on the purchase of hemp seed, and promotion of Vermont hemp businesses to produce seed for the local market.”

“I have been told that I am legal to grow but never got any valid credential”