

High hopes for hemp industries

By **CASSIE RYAN & ETHAN YANG**
Epoch Times Staff

Spending day after day in fields of cannabis, one can come up with some pretty offbeat ideas—like making houses out of hemp.

But Dr. Susanna Wilkerson has great visions for a plant often maligned for its association with drug use.

The founder of Australian company Pure Delight Hemp says the fibrous plant could replace trees as a source of the world's paper. Its seeds are nothing short of a superfood and it can decontaminate vast tracts of land, including nuclear wastelands.

And yes, it can be used to create a building material, called "hempcrete," which is six times more insulating than concrete for heat and sound. It is also lighter, non-toxic, and fire resistant, Dr. Wilkerson says.

In fact, the Canadian-born naturopath believes that hemp is the answer to a sustainable future. From her property in north Queensland's Atherton Tablelands, she produces hemp to make cosmetics, food, fuel, paper, textiles, and now building materials.

"Hemp has more uses and is more sustainable than any single plant on the planet," Dr. Wilkerson says.

"It is the obvious solution for pretty much every ecological situation we've got. That includes global warming, soil degradation, deforestation and bad farming, including the problems associated with animal farming."

Cannabis sativa is the longest and strongest known fibre in the plant world. Since the invention of paper about 2,000 years ago, hemp has been used to make the finest and most enduring of papers. In 1611, the King James Bible was printed on hemp in Britain, as was America's Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Levi jeans were originally made



Hemp hand bags are among the many hemp products for sale at the 'Capitol Hemp' store in Washington, D.C. TIM SLOAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

from recycled hemp sail cloth. Before the U.S. Marijuana Tax Act in 1937, 70 percent of all rope, twine, and cordage was made from hemp.

HEMP VS. MARIJUANA

In the early 1900s, however, prohibition of cannabis began due to recreational drug use. Hemp and the drug marijuana are from the same cannabis family, but according to Dr. David West, who holds a Ph.D. in Plant Breeding from the University of Minnesota, they are as different as opium poppies and common garden poppies.

"Many believe that by legalizing hemp they are legalizing marijuana. Yet in more than two dozen other countries, governments have accepted the distinction between the two types of cannabis, and while continuing to penalize the growing of marijuana, have

legalized the growing of industrial hemp," he wrote in a research paper on the topic.

Marijuana strains are high in the psychoactive cannabinoid THC and low in the antipsychotic cannabinoid CBD. Conversely, other variants are high in CBD and low in THC, and it is these that are known as industrial hemp.

Nowadays, commercial growers generally need a licence stipulating the use of varieties that have virtually no drug content, but the damage to the plant's reputation has taken a long time to heal.

Dr. Wilkerson believes those days are behind us. Her company is producing hemp paper samples in Tasmania with the hope of eventually eliminating old-growth forest harvesting. By removing one of the key sources of deforestation, hemp could play a major part in

reducing global warming.

"There is not a single reason why another tree should be felled for paper pulp," she said. "It's ludicrous and environmentally irresponsible at the highest level."

The plant could also replace thirsty crops like cotton, without the use of chemicals and with much less impact on the soil.

It can also be used as a "mop-up crop" for sewerage treatment, with one acre capable of absorbing 10 million litres of effluent, while at the same time producing 18 tonnes of fibre. It has even been used to decontaminate the Chernobyl nuclear disaster site.

And nutritionally, the balance of omega oils in the hemp seed is the closest to the ratio needed by humans, with the added bonus of high contents of protein, minerals, and vitamins.

Millionaire plans to farm Detroit's desolation

DETROIT CONTINUED FROM P1

He then came to the conclusion that what Detroit needs is a scarcity of land.

"Vacant land is a train wreck, it destroys land, it destroys community. The worst part of vacant land is that it consumes the city's resources."

Hantz's estimate, confirmed by the city, indicates that each parcel of vacant land in Detroit costs the city about C\$2,475 a year to maintain when various services, such as police protection, fire protection, and lawn mowing are accounted for. With 200,000 vacant parcels, that amounts to a C\$495 million-a-year tab. It's no surprise that Detroit currently faces a budget deficit of more than C\$309.5 million.

Even if Hantz Farms fails, just by taking over the land and mowing the grass, Hantz will be doing the city a service—relieving it of approximately C\$3.61 million in maintenance fees. If he pays his taxes on the land, which he plans to, he will also be giving the city money over and above that.

Hantz concedes that Hantz Farms is a "little thing" amid a big problem in Detroit, but he hopes it will be inspirational to over 700,000 residents of the city, who can also acquire ownership of city land for farming.

"Even if you add up 700,000 people doing a little thing, you get a pretty big thing—that's the pendulum that I am hoping the farm impacts," he said.

MAKING IT WORK

Hantz Farms won't be a typical farm with sprawling fields. Hantz has consulted with agricultural

experts at the Michigan State University and the Kellogg Foundation and plans on using all the agricultural ingenuity the modern world can afford to make his endeavour work. His 1 to 1.13 square kilometres will be split up into "pods" throughout the city and will grow vertically.

He eventually plans to incorporate aquaculture (fish farming), hydroponics (growing plants in water), and aeroponics (growing plants in air), all of which can be housed in buildings.

Some worry that Detroit soil may no longer be suitable for farming. Hantz Farms will initially limit itself to former residential properties, not commercial buildings, in order to cut down on the possibility of

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— John Hantz

difficult land.

"That's going to be one of our biggest costs, going through the parcels," Hantz said.

An increasing number of community gardens in Detroit—from approximately 80 in 2003 to 1,300 at present—seem to attest to the viability of Detroit's soil. According to Dan Carmody, the head of Detroit's mammoth farmer's market, Eastern Market, there are a variety of solutions to Detroit's soil quality.

"There are short-term solutions, there are long-term solutions, but [the soil quality] should not be an impediment," Carmody said in a panel discussion at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

He cited the planting of sunflowers, which can leech heavy metals out of soil, and also said that 30 centimetres of top-soil can be simply put on top as a viable solution.

300 alleged mobsters arrested in Italy

Suspected godfather among them

By **ANDREY VOLKOV**
Epoch Times Staff

Italian police have carried out mass arrests of the country's most powerful mafia, bringing in 300 suspected mobsters including the 80-year-old man known as the mob's godfather.

The men, all allegedly belonging to the Ndrangheta, Italy's most powerful mafia, were arrested on suspicion of murder, money laundering, extortion, arms and drug trafficking, and other crimes.

The Ndrangheta, also known as the Clabrian mafia, has a "complex criminal organization, governed by a true dome, with a centralized, pyramidal command structure," in some ways resembling Sicilian mafia Cosa Nostra, according to the Italian anti-mafia bureau.

The alleged godfather of the organization, Domenico Oppedisano, was appointed head of the criminal syndicate during a wedding in August 2009, Italian news agency ANSA reports.

The police sweep, involving about 3,000 officers, is the biggest sting operation against the mob in 15 years. The operation also involved arrests in the United States.

In addition, police seized tens of millions of dollars of the mafia's assets. The Ndrangheta is believed to be the main broker for international cocaine traffic coming from South America.

Eurispes, a leading Italian non-profit think tank, has estimated the Ndrangheta's turnover from its criminal activities at C\$56.7 billion.

Countries aim to double the world's dwindling tiger numbers

By **EVA CHEN**
Epoch Times Staff

SURABAYA, Indonesia—Widespread habitat destruction and illegal trade of tiger parts for medicine and fashion have all but devastated the world's magnificent big striped cats.

Today, only six out of nine tiger species still exist in the wild, and the population has dropped since the turn of the century from an estimated 100,000 to 3,200, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

However, plans for a global tiger recovery program are in the works as representatives from 13 tiger-range countries met for a three-day Pre-Tiger Summit Partners meeting in Bali, Indonesia, on July 12.

The meeting was an important precursor to the upcoming Global Tiger Summit in St. Petersburg, in September, where drafts formulated at the pre-summit will be ratified.

Delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam are working to draft a "Global Tiger Recovery Program" aimed at doubling the world's wild tiger population by 2022.

Indonesian Forestry Minister Zulkifli Hassan in his opening speech said that in Indonesia, only the Sumatran tigers still remain in the wild. Balinese tigers were hunted to extinction before the 1940s and Javan tigers were all killed in the 1980s, according to The Jakarta Post. "The existence of [the] Sumatran tiger is also alarming, so we endeavor to conserve them through a mix of strategic policy, regulation, and action," Hassan said.

The minister said that tigers—already under threat from illegal trade and massive habitat destruction—are now confronting more hunts than ever to meet the demand for tiger parts in traditional medicine, health tonics, ornamentation, and even fashion.

To protect the big cats, Indonesia has pledged to enforce severe penalties against poachers and illegal loggers.



A captive Sumatran tiger at Jakarta's Ragunan Zoo. ROMEO GACAD/GETTY IMAGES

During the meeting, each delegate outlined their country's tiger recovery plan, including their contributions to support global tiger recovery and their funding for conservation programs.

WWF says the population of wild tigers has declined and from nine tiger sub-species to just six today—the Sumatran, Bengal, Amur, Indochinese, South China, and Malayan tiger.

Experts warn that poaching, illegal trade, loss of prey, and retaliatory killing due to conflict with villagers living around tiger habitat are pushing tigers to the brink of extinction. Forest destruction has also contributed to the rapid decline in tiger numbers.

Also attending the meeting were world tiger experts, WWF representatives, and the Global Tiger Initiative, as well as donor agencies including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

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