A NEW CROP TO TAKE ROOT ON SENECA TERRITORY

The Thunderers have passed through, heralding another Spring, the animals are awakening with fervent energy to ready themselves for another generation, and our People are facing an unprecedented situation of our time. Sustenance of our being has been awakened with the pandemic at our doorsteps, and with that a heightened consciousness of the need to strengthen our agricultural roots to sustain our access to food and well-being.

The Great Hill People also known as the Seneca, have been prominent for their feats of agriculture since time immemorial, but agriculture among the Seneca was forever changed by the flooding brought on by the Kinzua Dam that took vast amounts of fertile land in one broad swoop, then thrusting families into a re-location area to accustom to a different way of life. And further thwarted by the taking of our children into boarding schools and thus acculturating us towards a new kind-of-way, far from our roots of subsistence upon the lands to provide for each other. Yet, we remain steadfast as the descendants of the ones that survived, and now more than ever we shall continue to thrive and grow. The next moon shall guide us once again into another season of sowing, and with this upcoming season the Seneca may add another crop to their list, hemp.

On March 30, 2020, the United States Department of Agriculture formally approved the Seneca Nation Hemp Production Plan, so now the Seneca Nation has primary regulatory authority over the production of this emerging crop. Furthermore, on April 11, 2020, the Seneca Nation Council approved the Hemp Ordinance, as amended.

The Hemp Program has come quite a way from a seed-of-thought being planted into action in May of 2019, to the formal beginning of a Seneca Nation Hemp Program in October of 2019, and now onto the precipice of a new outdoor growing season and the endless possibilities of indoor production. The Hemp Ordinance covers the production of hemp, which means the growing, handling, storing, and marketing of hemp in relation to production. Individuals and business entities may apply for licensure on Seneca Territory. Also, there are mechanisms in-place that will require producers to safeguard our soil, water, and air quality.

To be clear, the product known as CBD or “Cannabidiol” remains illegal under federal purview to add to food-stuffs or beverages. However, one may see it in retail stores throughout the country, yet it remains up to the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDAs) discretion to enforce their will. On the other side of the coin, products such as: hulled hemp seed, hemp seed oil, and hemp seed protein powder are legal and considered Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS) by the FDA. For, the hemp seed itself is inherently void of tetrahydrocannabinol [(THC) ~ the principle psychoactive compound, out of at least 113 other compounds found in cannabis)]. Yet, also on the cannabis spectrum there are tens-of-thousands of other uses, and many more in development that make hemp a pliable plant for industries such as: paper, clothing, bio-fuel, bio-degradable plastic, food, and so much more!

The industry remains hopeful for its future even during the pandemic that is upon us. The Hemp Program has already committed to training and authorizing hemp sampling agents within our own law enforcement, and the in-house expertise from various offices and departments have lent some of their skills to contribute to the roll-out of this program. The initial application period will be on a rolling basis upon implementation on Seneca Territory, however with the given COVID-19 situation the Seneca Nation is dealing with, the opening of applications will be delayed until the collaborating departments are on-line to accommodate the extra tasks that will be asked of them.

Timing is of essence and in agriculture it is paramount, and the program will keep the people informed on the developments going-forward. Enjoy this prescribed pause as much as one can, hopefully you may find yourself planting a garden of any feasible size with great care and intent. Please be safe and be well.

~Jessica Crouse, Hemp Compliance Administrator