

UF/IFAS Industrial Hemp Pilot Project: What Farmers Should Know Before Planting

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Rules and regulations are being prepared for industrial hemp farming in Florida. Hemp may look like an exciting new crop that might be an alternative revenue stream, but it is important to understand these rules and regulations, and recognize the inherent risks associated with hemp production. Some of these risks may only be revealed well after the crop has been planted and may be costly to address after the fact. Remember that there are many undetermined factors regarding how industrial hemp will grow in Florida's unique environmental conditions under current production systems.

Make sure that you are up to date on the rules and regulations at:

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/hemp>
<https://www.fdacs.gov/Cannabis/Hemp-CBD-in-Florida>

Review reference materials from the UF/IFAS Industrial Hemp Pilot Project at:

<https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/hemp/>

Hemp Farming Remains Risky

- It is NOT legal for farmers to plant industrial hemp without a cultivation permit from FDACS.
- Seed importation and transportation will require special permits and documentation from state and federal agencies and other entities.

- It is premature at this time to recommend specific seeds or cultivars that will be successful in Florida. It is likely that varieties from northern origins will mature and flower too rapidly. Many 'varieties' are not yet stable in terms of plant growth or THC development. The goal is a certified variety from sub-tropical environments that consistently performs well in Florida with THC that does not exceed 0.3% total THC by dry weight.
- Hemp plantings grown in a defined area that surpass the legal limit of 0.3% total THC by dry weight will have to be disposed of, perhaps under the supervision of someone authorized to handle controlled substances. Hemp plants can surpass the legal limit (i.e., test over 0.3% total THC by dry weight) due to genetics or a variety of stress driven by factors such as heat, moisture, nutrition, or pests. Testing for THC levels will be performed per USDA and FDACS requirements.
- Due to the lack of knowledge on how industrial hemp will perform in Florida, the potential for it to escape from cultivation and become invasive must be seriously considered. In other states and countries, hemp has been, or is, regarded as a weed. Other possible environmental impacts of its introduction in Florida should be considered. Careful consideration and effective control measures must be embraced in order to avoid future problems in nearby cultivated and natural areas.

- Hemp plantings may require additional security measures to deter trespassing and theft.
- Registered agrochemicals or pesticides labeled for use on industrial hemp are extremely limited. Weeds, pests and diseases will need to be controlled by other mechanical, physical, cultural and biological methods.
- Financial institutions willing to loan money to industrial hemp farmers are limited due to the risk of suspicious activity. Federal crop insurance may be available to farmers on a multi-crop insurance program.

- Make sure you have a market or buyer before you make investments to cultivate hemp.
- Have all contracts reviewed by an experienced legal authority.
- Local law enforcement agencies will need to be educated on the differences between hemp and marijuana and a list of permitted farmers will need to be available to them so they can cross-check against suspected illegal operations.
- There are many claims as to the success of growing hemp and its economic returns. Before jumping into any venture, is it important to look at all aspects and angles to make sure that it will be profitable for your current situation.
- Talk to other farmers in states where it is currently legal to grow hemp and hear what they have to say about this crop.
- Consult with your local and regional UF/IFAS Extension county agents and faculty.

Be Prepared

- Learn all you can about industrial hemp. The UF/IFAS Hemp Pilot Project is here to help but there is still a lot to research and understand. To stay up to date with the latest research from UF/IFAS, subscribe at <https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/hemp/newsletter>.
- Each grower will have to apply for a permit from FDACS in order to grow industrial hemp and comply with the state and federal regulations. Refer to their website for the application procedure and process.
- Growing flowers to extract CBD, and/or other components, is very different than growing for fiber and grain. The specific cropping system will depend upon the type of hemp a producer wants to grow. It is best to select what type of hemp you want to grow based upon sound market availability and then learn about the production methodology associated with it.
- Get your soil fertility and water source tested before planting. The UF/IFAS Extension Soil Testing Laboratory offers this service <http://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu/ESTL%20Tests.asp>, click on “Producer Soil Test”.
- Due to Florida’s predominately sandy soils, nematodes (microscopic plant-parasitic roundworms) might be a problem and it will be important to have your soil checked for those as well via a nematode assay. For more information visit the UF/IFAS Entomology & Nematology Nematode Assay Lab at http://nematology.ifas.ufl.edu/assaylab/Sample_Submission.html.
- Purchase only certified or pilot project approved seeds and plants from reputable sources that meet FDACS rules.
- Start with a small amount of acreage and learn as you go for your specific operation.

