



## LANSING

# Hemp poised to take root

State officials launch industrial farming in time for 2019 growing season

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Michigan farmers can plant industrial hemp this year under a pilot program announced Thursday by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

"Michigan is uniquely positioned to grow, process and manufacture industrial hemp. We are one of the nation's most agriculturally diverse states — growing 300 different commodities on a commercial basis — making it a natural fit," Whitmer said.

"This emerging crop not only cultivates new opportunity for our farming community, but it also creates an avenue for new businesses to crop up across the state."

Cultivating industrial hemp was banned on the federal level decades ago with its close relative marijuana. But the 2014 Farm Bill allowed states to implement pilot programs to grow it for research purposes.

Michigan did not launch a program under that provision, but voters legalized it in November with marijuana. The last barrier fell when Congress legalized hemp in the 2018 Farm Bill in December.

While regulations from U.S. Department of Agriculture for industrial hemp are not expected until later this year, Michigan officials are moving forward to allow farmers, processors and universities to put crops in the ground this year.

"Michigan's pilot program allows our farmers to explore the production and processing for hemp to determine whether or not this is a financially viable crop for them," said Gary McDowell, director of the agriculture department. "It also helps pave the way for Michigan growers as we move toward a permanent licensing program next year to identify and expand value-added hemp processing and new market prospects."

Growing hemp for fiber and seed won't get anyone high. It must contain less than 0.3 percent of the psychoactive chemical tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to be legal.

To grow hemp in Michigan this year, farmers have to register with the state and obtain a license. The grower registration fee is \$100, and a license to process and handle hemp costs \$1,350.