



Cannabis Beyond the Stigma: New Possibilities for a Traditional Resource of Himachal Pradesh

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A familiar Himalayan plant is attracting interest for products that reach far beyond its association with intoxicating drugs. Industrial hemp can supply fibre for textiles and crafts, seeds for food and oil, and woody material for lightweight building products. For Himachal Pradesh, these uses offer a possible connection between traditional knowledge and new rural enterprises. This article explains the crop through its everyday products and shows why suitable cultivation, local processing and dependable markets must develop together for farmers and village artisans to benefit.

Keywords: industrial hemp, Himachal Pradesh, natural fibre, hempseed, rural livelihoods

An old resource with a new story

A pair of traditional fibre slippers and a modern insulating wall seem worlds apart. Hemp provides a connection between them. In Himachal Pradesh, cannabis is a familiar sight, often viewed as unwanted vegetation or associated with intoxicating drugs. Yet its stems have also supplied material for useful household articles. Research from Outer Siraj in Kullu records the use of cannabis fibre in traditional footwear known as pula, reminding us that the plant has a place in local craft knowledge as well as public debate (Bhardwaj et al., 2014). Today, interest in plant fibres, seed foods and alternative building materials gives this old resource a fresh setting. For a hill farmer, the opportunity is more concrete than a long list of industrial uses: it could mean supplying a suitable raw material, joining a small processing enterprise or working with artisans who turn fibre into a saleable article. Understanding how each part of the crop becomes a product is the first step. The Government of Himachal Pradesh has created a legal route for licensed cannabis cultivation for specified purposes. Its 2026 framework permits regulated industrial hemp cultivation, subject to licensing, THC standards and controls on handling and sale (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2026). This policy development gives a formal basis for exploring hemp-based farm and village enterprises; it does not permit unrestricted cultivation or recreational use.

Getting to know industrial hemp

Industrial hemp (*Cannabis sativa* L.) refers to cannabis cultivated for permitted uses under applicable low-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, requirements. THC is the principal intoxicating constituent of cannabis. The familiar roadside plant cannot be assumed to be suitable planting material merely because it looks like hemp; cultivation requires appropriate material and authorisation under the relevant state framework. Hemp is described as a multipurpose crop because different plant parts have different uses. The outer stem supplies fibre, the inner woody portion supplies a light plant material, and the mature seeds supply food ingredients and oil. These uses are well documented (Schlutenhofer & Yuan, 2017). However, a crop intended for fine fibre and one intended for seed need different management and harvesting decisions. Choosing the product helps define the farming system.



Figure 1. A hemp stem and seeds can supply different products. Original schematic, not to scale; uses summarised from the cited literature.

Following the plant into everyday products

Fibre that carries village skills forward. Hemp fibre comes from the outer region of the stem and can be used in rope, woven articles, textiles and fibre composites. These products demand different qualities: material suitable for a rustic craft may need further cleaning and refinement before it can be used in a textile. This gives traditional knowledge an important starting role. Better finishing, comfortable designs and consistent quality could help familiar fibre articles reach new customers. For Himachal, the appeal lies in combining local skills with product development rather than simply selling an unprocessed stem. Seeds that belong in the food story. Hempseed contains protein and an oil rich in unsaturated fatty acids. Whole seeds, dehulled kernels and pressed oil offer different food ingredients; removing the hull changes the balance of fibre, protein and oil in the product. Farinon et al. (2020) explain the nutritional value of hempseed and the variation among products. Seed foods should also be distinguished from extracts made from cannabis flowers. Their place is primarily in food and nutrition, with suitable processing, storage and compliance with food standards. A woody core with a second use. Once the outer fibre is separated, the stem leaves a woody fraction called hurd or shiv. When combined with suitable lime-based binders, it can form hempcrete, a lightweight material valued for insulation and moisture-related properties. Its role is generally as an insulating or infill material, rather than a direct replacement for load-bearing reinforced concrete (Jami et al., 2019). This is an example of how a fraction left after fibre extraction may find a separate use. Whether it adds value locally depends on access to a processor and a market for the material.

Processing gives the harvest its value

The journey from stem to fibre includes an important step called retting. Microbial activity helps break down substances that hold fibre bundles together and attach them to surrounding tissues, making separation easier. Retting and subsequent mechanical processing influence the cleanliness and quality of the fibre. Musio et al. (2018) show that harvest and processing choices affect the material available for higher-value applications. Good crop growth is therefore only part of the work. For a village enterprise, drying space, storage, fibre separation and grading are practical needs. If wet processing is used, wastewater management also needs attention. Shared facilities could make these services more accessible to small producers. The aim should be a dependable output that a buyer can use, with processing arrangements planned alongside cultivation.



Figure 2. A proposed sequence for planning a small hemp enterprise. Original illustration; this is a planning guide, not a measured income estimate.

Connecting hill farms with village enterprises

Hemp could create work beyond the field. Fibre cleaning, spinning, weaving, seed cleaning and product finishing each involve different skills and equipment. A possible arrangement is a small group of authorised growers linked to a processor or craft enterprise. Farmers would know the required product, while the enterprise would have a clearer supply plan. Artisans and rural youth could participate in processing, design and marketing where these activities are locally feasible. For example, a fibre venture might begin with a buyer who specifies the quality and quantity needed for a woven article. The group could then organise suitable planting material, technical advice, harvesting and shared processing around that requirement. This is a suggested approach for developing an enterprise, rather than a claim that such a model is already profitable throughout Himachal. A small, well-supported start would allow producers to learn which operations work locally.

Making room for hemp on the farm

The agronomic question is where hemp can fit alongside existing crops. Soil conditions, water availability, nutrient supply, variety and harvest purpose all affect performance (Visković et al., 2023). A plant that appears hardy in the wild does not automatically produce a uniform, good-quality commercial harvest. Local assessment and appropriate agronomic advice are needed before extending a production system from another region to Himalayan farms. Hemp should be considered as an additional option within diversified farming. A household still needs food, fodder and time for other seasonal work. Small introductions can help farmers compare labour needs, crop performance and market returns while retaining these essentials. This approach makes diversification a practical choice based on experience, rather than a decision driven only by enthusiasm for a new market.

What would make the opportunity worthwhile

A farmer earns from accepted produce, not from the retail price of a finished hemp shirt or packet of seed. Useful accounts therefore begin with the amount sold and deduct the costs of seed, crop care, harvesting, family labour, processing, storage and transport. Agreed quality standards, payment terms and responsibility for rejected material help make the transaction clearer. Income from both seed and fibre should be counted only when the chosen system can actually supply both saleable products. For Himachal Pradesh, hemp offers an opportunity to connect an old resource with useful products and local skills. Its promise will become meaningful when farmers can grow suitable material, processors can handle it efficiently and customers are willing to buy it. A gradual approach that supports village enterprises while protecting soil fertility and household food and fodder needs can give this familiar plant a constructive place in the hill economy.

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