

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

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SECTION: Racing

LENGTH: 218 words

HEADLINE: Language of hemp proposal is approved

DATELINE: ASPEN, Colo.

BODY:

A man promoting industrial hemp as a legal cash crop in Colorado has cleared one hurdle in his quest.

Legislative staffers have approved the language and title of the proposal by Roy Hecker of Glenwood Springs. That means he can start circulating petitions to try to get the initiative on the November 2000 ballot.

Hemp, a cousin of the marijuana plant, is prized for its high fiber content. It is used to produce paper, rope and clothing. Hemp seeds have many industrial and medicinal uses, according to proponents.

Backers of legalizing the growing of hemp say it would be a boost for Colorado farmers.

The cultivation of hemp is allowed in several countries and used to be legal in the United States. The problem is THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, the active chemical in its look-alike cousin, marijuana. The chemical's content is low in hemp, and is stripped from it when used for commercial uses.

Legislators, though, have defeated moves to legalize hemp. Law enforcement officials have opposed the bills, saying because hemp looks like marijuana, its legalization could lead to proliferation of the illegal plant.

Lobbyists for the Colorado Farm Bureau and other ag agencies have said pushing hemp as a cash crop is a hard-sell because of its potential criminal and drug implications.