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Growing Opportunities Act Introduced to Reinforce Expanding Hemp Industry *Bi-partisan Authors Optimistic about Crop's Future*

Madison, WI – After a six decade absence, the Farm Freedom Act returned hemp cultivation to Wisconsin. Entering its second growing season, and following the federal government’s recent decision to remove hemp from the Controlled Substance List, interest in the crop has grown remarkably. In 2019, over 1,400 farmers applied for grower’s licenses from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) – up from 250 in year one. The number of hemp processor applications also grew exponentially – from around 100 to nearly 700.

On Friday, Senators Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point) and Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee) and Representatives Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) and Dave Considine (D-Baraboo) introduced the Growing Opportunities Act to help give farmers, processors, retailers, and consumers more confidence and certainty as the industry surges.

“Hemp is back in Wisconsin, and it’s back in a big way,” said Senator Testin. “It’s important that the State of Wisconsin empower farmers and processors to grow to meet that demand, while also offering consumers the ability to purchase these products with confidence of their safety.”

The new legislation creates truth in labeling laws for hemp products, and incorporates lessons learned over the past year to create a program that better meets the needs of farmers and processors.

Rep. Kurtz, a certified organic farmer who has a hemp growing license, commented on the bill’s development.

“We worked closely with DATCP, farmers, processors, and others to craft a fair bill that will enable folks to take advantages of new opportunities. At a time when commodity prices are low, it’s important to give our farmers the ability to diversify and explore more markets.”

Under the 2018 federal farm bill, states can either manage their own hemp program or wait for a federal agency to adopt oversight. The Growing Opportunities Act creates a framework to enable DATCP to keep managing Wisconsin’s program.

“The Growing Opportunities Act will align our state with the 2018 Farm Bill’s regulations for growing and processing hemp,” said Rep. Dave Considine (D-Baraboo). “This ensures that our state retains control of our growing hemp industry. I am excited to make the hemp industry more available and viable to Wisconsin’s farmers and agri-businesses, and I look forward to feedback and public input as we introduce this bill.”

“Wisconsin’s agricultural legacy has long included hemp. Today, we are again poised to be a key industry player,” said Sen. Taylor. She added: “With the assistance of technology, hemp cultivation, production, and product development are possible throughout the entire state. There are unlimited opportunities for urban communities to participate in the industry. As a nation, we already consume millions of dollars’ worth of products made from imported hemp. Why wouldn’t we use hemp to create family supporting jobs, right here in our own state?”

The proposal is currently circulating for co-sponsorship.

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