

Southern Oregon Hemp Cooperators, Inc.

An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs

In 2017, Mark Taylor's 43 year-old construction business was building greenhouses for Cannabis growers, as the legal market for Cannabis products took off. He quickly discovered he enjoyed the work, and the people who were entering the business, most of whom were small farmers seeking to augment their farming income and sustain their land and agricultural operations.

"I grew up on a farm in southern Oregon and these folks, mostly in their 40's and 50's, are just like us," said Taylor, "and I immediately took a liking and interest in what they were doing." Little did he know at the time he'd soon be doing a deep dive into the industry himself.

As the Cannabis revolution took hold in the region, Taylor noticed that more and more farmers were turning to Hemp cultivation. It's just easier, fewer regulations than high THC Cannabis, and the CBD market was just beginning to really open up at the time.

So Taylor started farming a small plot of Hemp himself, relying on the advice and support of a tight crew of local collaborators and associates. As he talked to other small Hemp farmers, Taylor began to understand that they all were experiencing similar problems and had similar needs. After doing some research on farming cooperatives, he decided to form a local incorporated cooperative and in February of 2019, the Southern Oregon Hemp Co-operators was incorporated.

"Farmers used to gather at roundtables, the Grange or over fences to discuss common issues," said Taylor. "We wanted to create an organization that would optimize farming operations for local growers so we created the co-op as a support network that provides farm contract and leasing information, bulk fertilizer purchases, labor and human resource allocation planning; as well as a brokerage service that matches buyers and sellers." The Co-op currently hosts The Pizza Meet Up at Wild River Pizza located at 2684 N Pacific Hwy, Medford, OR one Saturday each month for local farmers to share their own experiences and stories.

The organization's \$125.00 annual membership fee supports the many farming and sales assistance programs the Co-op provides, and also helps grow the local industry through cooperative efforts and ventures. Financial support from Membership is critical to keep the Co-op's programs going, so Co-op Members are appreciated for that reason, but the organization would never turn away a Farmer that might need its help.

"I saw my father's farm fail when I was twelve years old," said Taylor. "I can still remember the creditors showing up to cart off our equipment and cattle. I didn't want that kind of thing to happen to any local small farms, so I founded an organization to address common problems

faced by new Hemp farmers in the region.

“We are convinced that the future of Hemp production in the Pacific Northwest lies with smaller plots, planted and maintained by family farmers, that produce high quality yields of top-shelf flower,” said Taylor. “It’s an economy of scale issue for many, and given the labor and processing costs involved, growing Hemp just makes sense for the smaller farmer in many cases.

“In fact, many regional farmers employ a small Hemp grow as a hedge against the annual challenges of traditional agriculture, noted Taylor. “We know of vineyards, row croppers and even livestock ranchers who are making ends meet and sustaining their operations with small Hemp grows,” he said. “It is this population we have organized to serve.”

The Southern Oregon Hemp Co-op also produces and hosts the region’s annual Hemp, CBD & CBG trade show as well as the annual Golden Grow Awards ceremony, held in the evening at the trade show. The show is an opportunity for local growers to celebrate the recent harvest, as well as to present their Hemp cultivars to a panel of judges who will select the “Best Northwest Grower” of the year.

The organization hopes to continue on its growth curve, adding new regional farms and vendors to the mix - as well as expand and enhance the annual Hemp, CBD & CBG Trade Show it hosts. *Importantly, founding board member, Mark Taylor, has just been appointed to the board of directors of the Oregon Industrial Hemp Farmers Association (OIHFA) and will use this new role to further represent and advocate for the southern Oregon regional Hemp industry.* As the organization grows and expands, new support services will be added to its already existing service and networking offerings. The organization is currently working with the USDA to become a recognized fiduciary with the “Value Added Producer Grant” (VAPG) program.

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About the Southern Oregon Hemp Co-op

Southern Oregon Hemp Cooperates, Inc., the “Co-op”, was incorporated by Mark Taylor in 2019 to serve the region’s Hemp farming community with education, advocacy, networking, trade shows, real estate acquisition and a co-operative product brokerage. The organization is governed by a board of directors and is supported by its membership and outside sponsors who seek to target the local Hemp industry. The Co-op can be reached through its website contact form at <http://www.soorhempco-op.com/>; or by leaving a message for Mark Taylor at (541) 601-5130.

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