

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Heimos Adds Hemp

Chris Beytes

Yet another ornamental grower has found a side business in the world of hemp. N.G. Heimos of Millstadt, Illinois, down by St. Louis, has signed on with a Denver breeding company called Trilogene Seeds to produce hemp seed—specifically, “feminized” hemp seed, which Trilogene says is desirable, as it ensures the crop will be 99% female plants (more on this in a bit).

“With the growing demand from the agricultural and health and wellness industries, the need to increase the production of feminized hemp seeds is critical,” said Matt Haddad, Trilogene’s founder and CEO. “We have been committed to developing our craft hemp strains for over four years to help stabilize unique varieties for farmers all over the world. Being able to grow our seeds in Heimos’ controlled environment will ensure the purity of our feminized genetics and our ability to produce and provide vigorous varieties that will yield massive CBD and other minor cannabinoids output for non-psycho-active cannabinoid farmers.”

In 2019, Trilogene planted 1.3 million feminized hemp seeds all over the United States, from Colorado to Delaware to Hawaii. This new alliance, Matt said, will up the production to over 100 million seeds by June of 2020.

Bernie Heimos, president of the family business, explained in a statement, “This partnership hits the core of our business by expanding production into today’s relevant crops. Although we have no plans to exit the horticulture field, we feel this decision makes sense for us in our expansion plans.”

To learn a bit more than what the press release offered, GrowerTalks emailed Bernie the following questions:

GrowerTalks: Why add hemp seed to your flower business?

Bernie: Since the Farm Bill passed and hemp has become legal to produce, we have been doing seed starts for local farmers. We signed the deal with Trilogene because they have some very good genetics and we feel we can produce seed at a reasonable cost.

GT: What do you anticipate the benefits being for Heimos, short and long term?

Bernie: We see this as another branch of our business. We are now working toward adding greenhouses to do this production in, and it needs to be a stand-alone profit center.

GT: You’re going to be producing seed? Can you explain a bit about how that works?

Bernie: Seed is the product as well as seed and clone starts for the farmers in our area. The process is proprietary to Trilogene, so I will not discuss that.

GT: How much of your space will hemp occupy?

Bernie: We are currently using 1 acre of our space, but plan to expand to 4 acres.

GT: Some things I've read recently make me think we may already be overproducing hemp for CBD oil. Prices and demand could plummet. Do you worry that this won't be the long-term lucrative business you might hope?

Bernie: This is why we are making this a branch of our business and not our complete business. It will provide three turns a year with the space, and at the rate growers are closing or switching [from flowers to hemp], our space is in demand. This industry has only proven one thing to us: You either change with the times or fall behind. We want to grow relevant crops, and this is the new frontier.

Why “feminized” seed?

To find out why someone would want female seed rather than male, we asked cannabis expert, Dr. Brian Corr, author of our “Corr on Cannabis” column.

According to Brian, feminized hemp seed is seed that's been produced in such a way that all of the plants grown from the seed are female (in practice most, but not truly all, he adds). “Normal” cannabis seed produces plants with a 50:50 ratio of male to female.

Why are female plants good and male plants bad? Because if there are male plants present, the female plants will get pollinated and produce seed, and when plants produce seed, the cannabinoid content (CBD—the useful oil) is much lower. Plus, male plants tend to have lower levels of cannabinoids than females. Without males present, the female plants make no seed and lots of oil.

As for the importance of feminized seed, Brian said there was a lawsuit filed by a Kentucky grower claiming \$44 million in losses after an Oregon hemp seed producer sent them more than 6 million seeds that were mostly males instead of feminized, as promised. **GT**