

Hemp seed decision applauded



The decision by New Zealand and Australia food safety authorities to allow hemp seed to be used in food has been greeted with delight and excitement by Ashburton-based Midlands Nutritional Oils.

Andrew Davidson, managing director of Midlands Nutritional Oils and director of its partner company, Midlands Seed, said the legalising of hemp seed as food in New Zealand was very exciting for the company and for local grower suppliers. It was also a fantastic opportunity for consumers.

The industry had been consulting with food safety authorities for about 18 years and Midlands had been waiting 16 years for the decision, Mr Davidson said.

Midlands Nutritional Oils and Midlands Seed were among the first companies in New Zealand to be granted a licence to grow hemp back in the 2001-2002 season.

The companies were also the first to grow and process hemp seed into oil for retail sale and became the first New Zealand company to produce hemp seed protein, and hulled hemp seed.

The decision created opportunities for existing products, Mr Davidson said.

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Andrew Davidson; left, a paddock of hemp.

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He sees a big market for the products and said the company would invest in further processing infrastructure. "I'd like to think we would employ more staff, and this change will make locally grown hemp more globally competitive."

Before the standard can take effect in New Zealand, changes to regulations under the Food Act, Misuse of Drugs Act and Medicines Act will need to be made, a process which may take up to 18 months.

Mr Davidson said the

company would be very focused on working with regulatory authorities to implement this legislative change.

"The sooner we can get New Zealand products out and secure shelf space the better. The longer it takes the more chance there is for competing imported products. I think it is going to take some time to establish this market due to this constraint."

Mr Davidson said it could be difficult for growers to get into hemp crops in the coming season due to the legislative timelines, but in the following season and beyond there would be an increase in demand.

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