

Press release of the „European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA)“ from 20-12-2005

„European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA)“ officially founded now – International hemp conference exhibits optimism in view of the increasing demand for fibres, shives and seeds

On 23 November 2005, the „European Industrial Hemp Association“ was included in the registry of associations of the County Court Brühl (Germany) under the number “VR 1397”. Therefore the more than five years old status of a totally informal association which had been founded on 14 September 2000 in Wolfsburg was brought to an end and converted into an official association.

At the general meeting on 27 November in Hürth, the board of directors and the executive committee of the association were elected unanimously. John Hobson, Hemcore Ltd. (Great Britain), became chairperson (president) of the association, Cesare Tofani, Fibranova (Italy), first deputy, and Bernd Frank, Badische Naturfaseraufbereitung GmbH (Germany) second deputy. The nova-Institut GmbH, Hürth, with its managing director Michael Karus, was assigned with the management of the EIHA, initially for one year.

When it was founded, the European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA) had seven members from the EU countries Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, all of them primary processors of hemp (so-called fibre separation companies). Meanwhile there are another 20 membership applications on hand that have to be decided upon within a short time. Interested parties can find the application form on the internet (www.eiha.org).

The statute makes a difference between “regular” and “associate” members. While any person or institution can become an associate member, “regular membership is restricted to those legal entities or companies which perform the processing of hemp straw to fibres and hurds/shives or hemp raw materials...”

For the next year, the EIHA has planned a range of activities. Particularly the setup of a content management system that shall supply studies and background information on the cultivation, processing and utilisation of hemp via the internet. Furthermore an overview study of the ecobalances for hemp products that have been conducted so far and the preparation of the next EIHA conference at the end of 2006 is planned.

Third International Conference of the European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA) – increasing interest in hemp fibres and shives

On 28 and 29 November 2005, the third International EIHA Conference took place in Cologne, this could establish itself as an expert meeting of the natural fibre branch in Europe and also world-wide. This year 70 experts from 15 countries met one other in order to inform themselves about the latest developments concerning hemp and other natural fibres and to intensively participate with one another in an open and free ranging discussion. The spectrum of participants ranged from cultivation consulting, primary and further processing, trade, mechanical engineering and investors to numerous small and medium-sized enterprises and to globally operating automotive enterprises and suppliers. They all had in common that they were interested in the utilisation of hemp fibres and shives.

Due to the increasing petroleum prices and the globally narrow production capacities for plastics, materials based on natural fibres are becoming increasingly interesting for industry. Particularly the representatives of the automotive and building material industry who already have comprehensive experiences with the use of renewable resources, presented themselves as very open-minded towards increasingly banking on materials that are largely independent from the petroleum price. Only in this way, companies can enter into long-term supply contracts with fixed prices.

However, presently the hemp industry is only just keeping pace with the increasing demand for natural fibres. Indeed, cultivation, harvest and processing could be professionalised and modernised to such an extent in the past ten years that that good qualities can be guaranteed the all year round. But in order to be in a position to meet the demand of large companies, the branch has to grow sustainably and small companies have to make cooperations in order to give the large ones supply safety. This was an important issue at the EIHA conference and it was obvious that different companies were taking first steps here and that the EIHA structure itself can play an important role.

Also the future processing subsidy for hemp fibres by the EU was vividly discussed. Christian Renault, managing director of AND-International (Paris) and main author of the Ernst & Young study „Evaluation of the Common Market Organisation for flax and hemp“ for the EU Commission presented the most important results of the study. The experts present largely agreed to his analysis of markets, values added and prices, and supplemented the analysis with their own experiences.

Hemp short fibres that are produced for technical applications such as insulation or composites have difficulties in competing with the prices of Asian import fibres such as jute and kenaf, in spite of the increasing demand. Technical hemp short fibres are produced by small regional companies that have invested a lot into processing, product development and marketing and generated a large number of jobs – at this point, the Ernst & Young study showed that the processing of flax and hemp generates four to five times more jobs than the cultivation and processing of wheat (in relation to the same area under cultivation). In addition, the regionally produced hemp materials and products have substantial ecological advantages compared to petroleum-based products.

An overhasty end of the processing subsidy would endanger structures that do have considerable growth potentials in the next 5 to 10 years and are important for the preservation and creation of regional jobs, an environmentally friendly agriculture as well as the supply of ecological materials.

Therefore the hemp experts supported the proposal of the study not to abolish the processing subsidy for flax and hemp short fibres in the next year, but to introduce a uniform processing subsidy (single aid) for long and short fibres. The EU Commission is expected to submit a proposal for this in the near future.

At the beginning of 2006, a CD-ROM of the third EIHA congress with all presentations and further information will be released, it can be obtained via the EIHA website.

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Pictures of John Hobson (president), Cesare Tofani (first deputy), Bernd Frank (second deputy) and Michael Karus (managing director) can be downloaded at www.eiha.org („statute and application form“).