

# Ag Policy Blog – Progressive Farmer

## Kentucky Congressman Champions Deregulation of Industrial Hemp

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By [Chris Clayton](#), DTN Ag Policy Editor

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A freshman Kentucky congressman, and member of the House Agriculture Committee, attended the American Farm Bureau Federation convention on Sunday to promote his new legislation to deregulate industrial hemp nationally.

Rep. James Comer, a Republican representing Kentucky's 1st Congressional District, was the state's agricultural commissioner from 2012 to 2016 before being elected to Congress. During his time as ag commissioner, the state passed a bill to set up a regulatory framework to make industrial hemp a reality.

"That was six years ago. Today, Kentucky is the leading industrial-hemp producing state in the nation and 20 other states have passed similar legislation."

Comer's bill would reclassify industrial hemp from a controlled substance to an agricultural crop. The bill would make it clear it is not a drug and Comer said he does not support legalization of marijuana.

"I'm trying to differentiate between marijuana and hemp," he said.

Hemp generally has less than .3% of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the chemical compound that creates the high in marijuana, which generally has 15% or more THC. That difference is

"It is a crop that has a lot of potential, not just for farmers, but for manufacturing," Comer said.

Hemp can still produce Cannabidiol (CBD) oil that Comer said can be a solution in managing pain, and possibly help address the country's opioid crisis. CBD oil can treat pain in a non-addictive manner, he said.

"I think hemp has a very bright future, but we have to get the federal government off the backs of producers and give the private sector confidence that this is an agricultural crop and something worth investing in, not something they have to worry about some overzealous DEA agent or Department of Justice coming in and seizing their assets because they do not know the difference between hemp and marijuana."

Beyond CBD oil, Comer said there is a Louisville company making fiber, as well as a fiber foam that is going into at least some automobile production. Comer said other auto manufacturers want to research further uses for auto interiors as well. There are also companies using hemp to produce animal feed and bedding, he said.

"We're trying to utilize every part of the plant and I feel Kentucky has proven there is huge demand for hemp products," Comer said.

Comer said his bill has House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., as a co-sponsor. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., also is going to introduce a companion bill in the Senate. McConnell had language in the last farm bill to help commercialize the crop in the state.

Comer said he will likely look to move his legislation through the Energy and Commerce Committee, as well as Judiciary, but he said it is possible the bill might be included in the upcoming farm bill. Comer added,

however, that at least some members of the House Agriculture Committee are leery of dealing with a hemp-legalization bill.

"The Ag Committee really is not as crazy about this as some of the other committees," Comer said. "They hear hemp and they get scared."

Comer's bill comes, however, as Attorney General Jeff Sessions seeks to potentially reinstate more prosecutorial authority over marijuana even as more states are legalizing the drug. That could blur the lines in the debate about hemp as well.

The American Farm Bureau Federation also has endorsed the bill and the growth of industrial hemp as an agricultural industry.

Chris Clayton can be reached at [Chris.Clayton@dtn.com](mailto:Chris.Clayton@dtn.com)

Follow him on Twitter [@ChrisClaytonDTN](https://twitter.com/ChrisClaytonDTN)

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