

# Maine State Hemp Program

## Annual Report Fiscal Year 2024

Submitted December 2025



Amanda E. Beal  
Commissioner

Randy Charette  
Deputy Commissioner

Nancy McBrady  
Deputy Commissioner

18 Elkins Lane  
Augusta, ME 04333

(207) 287-3200  
[maine.gov/dacf](http://maine.gov/dacf)



## **INTRODUCTION**

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Division of Animal and Plant Health is pleased to submit this annual report on the State's hemp licensing program to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry pursuant to 7 MRSA § 2231 (11).

The 2024 season was good for most growers. The number of growers remains at 12. Eleven outdoor licensees applied for 31.2 acres but only planted 5.75 acres, and one indoor licensee applied for 100 square feet but only planted 39 square feet.

The hemp market in Maine remains relatively flat. According to the leading hemp market report, the assessed price of CBD hemp biomass reached an all-time low in April 2023 but appears to be on a slow upward path. However, the market report also points out that the most valuable hemp cannabinoids are those being used to make intoxicating hemp products, the sale of which is likely to be impacted by the federal FY2026 Agriculture appropriations law signed in November 2025 that seeks to ban certain intoxicating hemp products beginning in November 2026.

Until there is an investment in processing equipment, the hemp fiber market will not materialize in Maine. A similar problem exists in the hemp grain market. We have only had a single grain grower in Maine over the last three seasons. Unfortunately, last year, the entire two-acre grain crop failed, and this year, the crop was challenged by a serious weed infestation.

The median licensed grow site area remained less than an acre in 2024, and less than 500 pounds of dried flowers were harvested. The most successful business strategy we continue to see is vertically integrated, smaller, floral hemp grower businesses making cannabinoid products for niche markets. One grower has found a suitable buyer for CBD hemp biomass and sold 1200 pounds of dried biomass.

In the absence of investment in infrastructure to support other types of hemp crops, such as grain and fiber, the Program speculates that the number of licensed hemp growers will remain low. The revised licensing rules adopted by the Department in February 2023, which reduced licensing fees for growers who chose to produce grain or fiber, have not stimulated the issuance of additional licenses.

With the current permitting fee structure, the program requires at least 150-200 growers to generate sufficient revenue to fully fund it. If the number of licenses remains below 50, the Department may want to consider turning over the hemp licensing program to USDA-AMS. However, with significant staff reductions and restructuring activities currently taking place within the USDA, it may be prudent to also consider the agency's capacity to serve and support Maine hemp growers adequately. In 2024, the number of states that no longer license hemp growers, and where USDA now has oversight, increased from eight to eleven.

## **ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENT**

Under 7 MRSA § 2231 (11), the Department is to submit an annual report regarding the Hemp Program that provides:

- A. The number of licenses issued;
- B. The number of acres of all land areas licensed for the cultivation of hemp and the square footage of indoor facilities licensed for the cultivation of hemp;
- C. The total amount of harvested hemp, in pounds;

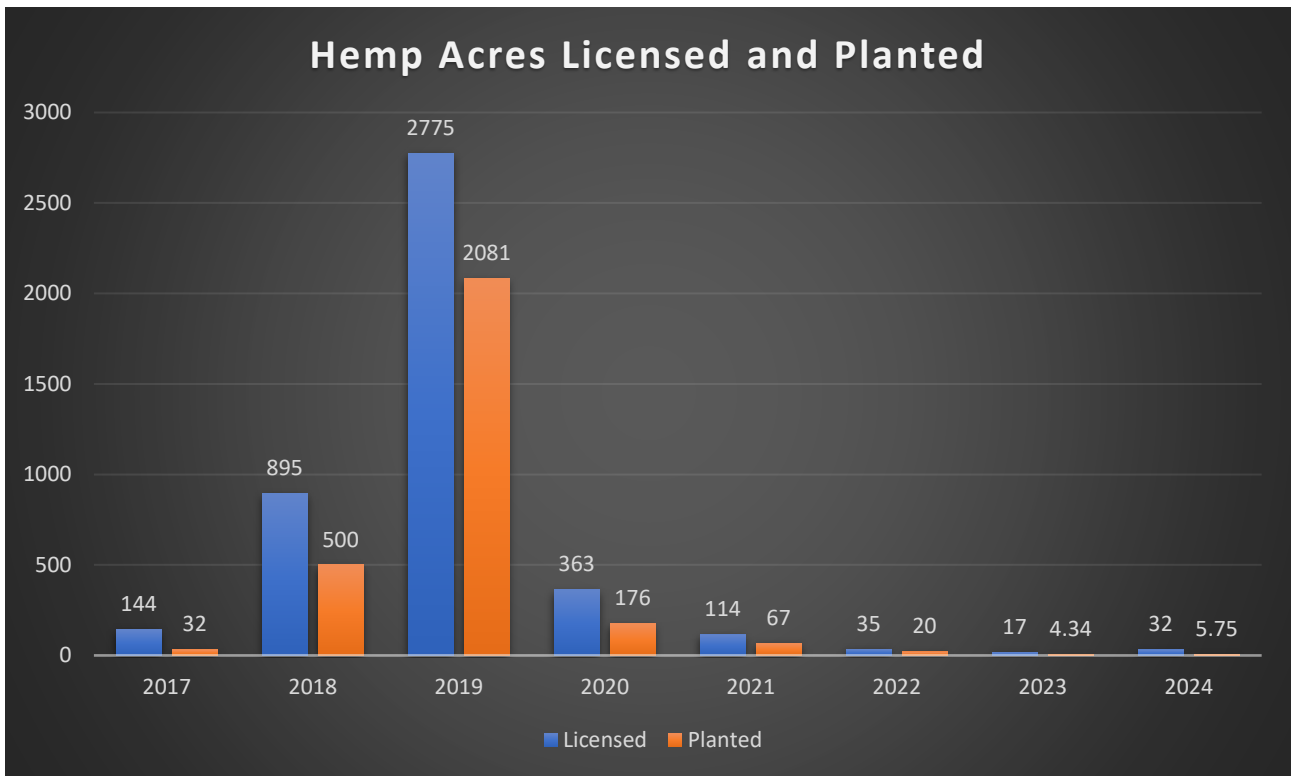
- D. The types of commodities or products derived from hemp manufactured or sold within the State; and
- E. The types of commodities or products derived from hemp exported outside the State.

A. The number of licenses issued in 2024; and,

B. The number of acres of all land areas licensed for hemp cultivation.

2024 marked the ninth year of operation for the Hemp Licensing Program. We received 14 applications and issued **12 final hemp license agreements to grow on 32 acres of land.**<sup>1</sup> By summertime, 12 license holders had planted the crop on approximately 5.75 acres. One indoor license was issued for 100 sq. ft.<sup>2</sup>

Licenses Issued	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Outdoor	32	82	181	111	49	17	11	11
Indoor			10	8	0	1	1	1



<sup>1</sup> Not everyone who applied for a license completed the process, and not everyone who was issued a license grew a crop.

<sup>2</sup> The one licensed indoor hemp grower never planted a crop.

### *C. Total amount of harvested hemp in pounds*

The Hemp Program now collects grower data through an online harvest report survey. Nine of 12 growers responded to the survey. Their unedited responses are included here as Appendix A.

Less than six acres (8,116 plants) were reported as harvested; one farmer reported significant crop losses due to excessive weeds. Total dry weights for the major categories of hemp products are presented below:

- 1482 pounds of whole plant/biomass
- 480 pounds of flower bud for cannabinoids
- 0 pounds for research purposes
- 0.125 pounds of seed for plant breeding
- 400 hemp seedlings sold
- 200 pounds of grain
- 0 pounds of fiber

*D. The types of commodities or products derived from hemp manufactured or sold within the State; and, E. The types of commodities or products derived from hemp exported outside the State.*

The same harvest survey was used to collect data from growers about the commodities that their hemp would be used to make for in-state and out-of-state markets. Survey takers could select multiple products.

The profiles of products sold in-state and out-of-state are very similar. Within Maine, the top products included CBD and CBG extracts, tinctures, full-spectrum oil, gummies, smokable bud, rolled spliffs, topicals, biomass for terpene extraction, pet treats, pet supplements, beverages, and capsules.

The top products sold to out-of-state markets included tinctures, CBD and CBG extracts, full-spectrum oil, topicals, smokable buds, rolled spliffs, gummies, pet treats, and pet supplements.

The appendix that follows includes all the unedited comments growers included with the year-end survey. The main themes the comments highlighted are:

- Uncertain markets make for challenging economics
- Continued regulatory uncertainty stifles market growth
- Lack of processing equipment reduces grower product diversity
- Out-of-state competition hinders profitability

## **DISCUSSION**

DACF remains concerned that the number of licensed hemp growers may not be sufficient to sustain the licensing program. The 2023 rules do not include provisions for licensing hemp processors, which could potentially increase the revenue collected.

At the request of the ACF Committee, the Department convened a stakeholder group to develop recommendations on regulating intoxicating hemp products. The group's recommendations included

age-gating all hemp products, other than fiber and grain, to be sold only to individuals who are 21 years of age or older. The Department's report back to the Committee is included here as Appendix B. Both the state and federal governments will need to decide if allowing hemp crops to be processed into intoxicating products is consistent with the original legislative intent when hemp cannabis was legalized.<sup>1</sup>

The Department will continue its work on other initiatives to give the hemp industry a much-needed boost while supporting Maine's farm economy. These include:

- Continuing to partner with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension on education and technical assistance, if a new specialist can be identified.
- Promoting other types of hemp crops. Grain and fiber crops are expected to be the future of hemp. Access to federal programs and lending institutions is vital to the kind of investment grain and fiber will likely require.
- Working with our Congressional delegation, fellow hemp regulators, and USDA on revisions to the Farm Bill and corresponding changes in the federal hemp rules.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2026 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agency Appropriations Act, which passed to end the 2025 shutdown of the federal government, included a significant reworking of the definition of hemp, including a definition of hemp-derived cannabinoid products. The new definition will effectively ban intoxicating hemp in consumer products. The definition makes no distinction between products explicitly developed and marketed for their intoxicating properties (e.g., hemp beverages) on the one hand, and full-spectrum hemp oil products such as tinctures and topicals largely used for wellness on the other. These latter products which form the core market for many Maine hemp growers will become illegal under the new definition.

# Appendix A

## UNEDITED GROWER COMMENTS ON THE 2024 GROWING SEASON

- Extremely challenging to make this work economically. Would help to have stable, consistent regulation with predictable requirements.
- Planting hemp is a labor of love for sure. It is very very hard to sell the product because society is very uneducated on the benefits of hemp (CBD oil). The other problem for us farmers in Maine trying to make a living with it is the fact that there is hemp CBD products being brought in from other states to sell in Maine. That hurts the Maine farms alot
- It's a rough business and a tough market. We are undecided if we will be doing it for many more years in this current economy and under the current administration.
- We primarily grow raw material for a company that produces organic full spectrum hemp products which include cbd oil, herbal teas and topicals which are sold in state and online.
- I had severe leaf Septoria.
- I have extract from previous years that we currently use to manufacture products. I am growing basically with the hopes someone might want flower and possibly manufacture some CBD.
- I will not likely sell any of my hemp grain this year because of my inability to process the grain after harvesting.
- After drying the crop, we thresh the whole plants on wire mesh tables and collect the dried leaf and flower portion of the plant for biomass that is sold to an in state company with a lab who does further processing into finished products.

## UNEDITED GROWER COMMENTS ABOUT THE HEMP PROGRAM AND ITS RULES

- Need to raise the THC limit for hemp to 1%. This is still a negligible amount but would take some of the risk out of growing hemp. Almost had to destroy my crop in 2023 thanks to a mistake by the testing lab used by the state. Was surprised to hear that the state is continuing to use this lab even though their carelessness nearly destroyed my business.

The state does not seem to have a legal avenue for non-commercial hemp growers--Mainers should be able to legally grow a modest amount of hemp for personal use without paying for a license.

Any assistance with marketing would be most welcome. Applied for state business development grants but was turned down twice, was told some of the committee members think they could somehow get in trouble for using Federal money for hemp (even though hemp is Federally legal, still seems to be a lot of confusion out there).

- As far as growing hemp I do not agree with having to have a background check, especially when that is not required to grow cannabis. The price we pay to grow hemp in Maine versus how hard it is to get our end product to start selling is killing the damn industry. I feel that is time for the government to step up and start enforcing the law that only Maine grown products be sold in Maine.

- A big thank you to Gary for all that he does!
- There should be a separate fee bracket for growing a number of plants that is far below 1 acre
- Working with Gary Fish was a pleasure.

Report Back to Legislature Re: Intoxicating Hemp-Derived Products

# Appendix B

## DACF 2024 REPORT BACK TO THE LEGISLATURE RE: INTOXICATING HEMP-DERIVED PRODUCTS



STATE OF MAINE  
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
 BUREAU OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & RURAL RESOURCES  
 28 STATE HOUSE STATION  
 AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS  
 GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL  
 COMMISSIONER

November 1, 2024

Sen. Henry Ingwerson, Senate Chair  
 Rep. Bill Pluecker, House Chair  
 Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
 Via Email

**RE: INTOXICATING HEMP-DERIVED PRODUCTS**

The 131st Legislature’s Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF) considered LD 1996, *An Act to Regulate Synthetic Hemp-derived Cannabinoids*. That bill recognized that Maine law provides no mechanism for limiting access to intoxicating hemp-derived products (IHDPs). This is true despite the intoxicating effects of some products that fall within the federal definition of hemp. Following a public hearing and work session on LD 1996, the committee voted unanimously that it ought not to pass. That vote notwithstanding, the committee recognized the gravity of the concerns behind the legislation. On February 14, 2024, you sent a letter requesting that the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) establish a working group to investigate this issue and develop recommendations. This letter constitutes DACF’s response to that request.

As requested, DACF convened a working group that included hemp producers and processors, public health experts (both from within State government and the private sector), and retail industry representatives. We also invited staff from State agencies with experience regulating retail products for their technical expertise. Craig Lapine, Director of DACF’s Bureau of Agriculture, Food & Rural Resources (BAFRR), and Gary Fish, State Horticulturalist and manager of the State’s Hemp Program, co-chaired the working group. Brooklyn Bolduc of BAFRR’s Agricultural Resource Development Division provided staff support. Members included the following:

<b>Community Members</b>	Alan Lapoint	Hemp beverage manufacturer
	Ben Edwards	Owner, Schoppe Farm
	Chas Gill	Owner, Merrymeeting Bay Hemp Co.
	Patty Hymanson, MD	Public health advocate and former state legislator
	Erica Haywood	Owner, LoveGrown Hemp
	Lizzy Hayes	Owner, Panorama Seeds
<b>State Staff</b>	Gabi Pierce	Policy Analyst, Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS)
	Louis Luchini	Director, DAFS Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations (BABLO)
	Larry Sanborn	Liquor Inspector, BABLO

CRAIG LAPINE, BUREAU DIRECTOR  
 AGRICULTURE, FOOD & RURAL RESOURCES  
 90 BLOSSOM LANE, DEERING BUILDING



PHONE: (207) 557-1623  
 FAX: (207) 287-7548  
 WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

	John Hudak	Director, DAFS Office of Cannabis Policy (OCP)
	Alexis Perry	Maine CDC
	Ben Metcalf	Inspection Program Manager, BAFRR Quality Assurance and Regulation Division

The group held one in-person meeting on June 20, 2024, and one virtual meeting on August 30, 2024. Input from group members was supplemented by responses to a questionnaire circulated among stakeholders during July and August.

Participants were unanimous that the status quo in which IHDPs are unregulated threatens public health and safety as well as the viability of Maine’s hemp industry. Hemp growers and processors recognize that accidental intoxications or other adverse impacts on Maine children and youth would be detrimental to growers and processors. Regulators and public health advocates expressed concerns regarding the health and safety impacts of these unregulated and untested intoxicating substances on consumers.

Concerns for consumers are amplified by the high potential for consumer confusion about the distinction between these unregulated IHDPs and adult-use cannabis that is tested, tracked, and age-gated within the State’s existing adult-use cannabis program. Further compounding those concerns is the reality that many unregulated IHDPs are packaged in a manner intended to mimic either existing adult-use cannabis products or, more dangerously, snack foods or sweets marketed to children. Thus, it was clear to all working group members that the continued unregulated manufacture and sale of these IHDPs in Maine should be stopped.

While not unanimous in every case, the working group broadly backed the following approach to regulating IHDPs:

**1. Age-gate at 21 all hemp products other than fiber and grain.**

A preponderance of the working group members advocated that the most straightforward way to protect both public safety and Maine’s hemp industry is to age-gate all hemp products, intoxicating or not. They recommended an exemption for fiber and seed products, which are unlikely to contain enough cannabinoids to be intoxicating.

A challenge for age-gating IHDPs is defining which products and compounds are intoxicating. Chemists have proven adept at creating new cannabinoids, so any fixed list of regulated molecules will likely develop loopholes as soon as it is promulgated. As a result, the working group concluded that the least complicated approach would be to age-gate all hemp products regardless of their potential to be intoxicating. This approach may add a burden for those marketing or selling CBD and full-spectrum products, but it makes enforcement clear-cut and straightforward. This recommendation is consistent with last year’s discussions at the State House regarding LD 1996.

**2. Cap THC content at 5 mg for IHDP beverages.**

Working group members felt that even with an age gate, 5 mg of hemp-derived tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) should be the maximum concentration per serving for hemp beverages. They also thought that this 5 mg THC/beverage serving cap should apply to any combination of THC, whether it is solely delta-9 THC or a combination of delta-8, -9, -10. As noted above, the market has demonstrated substantial creativity, and new THC molecules (and other cannabinoids) are regularly introduced to the consumer market.

Participants recommended that tinctures and other concentrated supplements be exempted from this cap.

**3. Take steps to minimize product confusion.**

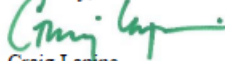
As noted above, many unregulated IHDPs are packaged intentionally to confuse consumers by mimicking either existing adult-use cannabis products or non-intoxicating consumer products. This confusion can be amplified within stores when IHDPs with copycat names or labels are displayed with or near the non-intoxicating products they mimic. The working group recommends the State prohibit both copycat packaging and displaying IHDPs and non-intoxicating products together.

**4. Adequately resource the agency tasked with enforcement.**

Enacting and implementing an age gate will require granting new authority to some state agency; no agency is currently statutorily sanctioned to enforce restrictions on federally legal hemp products. The working group recommended that the agency granted this authority be provided with adequate capacity and resources to take on the job and specific enforcement authority to implement the restrictions.

Like many Maine people, we at DACF are concerned about the State's inability to age-gate or restrict access to these products. We hope you find the recommendations of this working group helpful in your continued consideration of the topic.

Sincerely,



Craig Lapine  
Bureau Director

cc: Sen. Teresa Pierce, Cumberland  
Karen S. Nadeau, ACF Committee Legislative Analyst