

Hemp in Germany – Renaissance as Winter Cover Crop for high quality textile hemp-fibres

The presentation introduces to a recently accepted project by the EU and the German federal state North Rhine-Westphalia.

On the one hand farmers have to reduce nitrate leaching and soil erosions to increase the quality of groundwater, e.g. by planting (expensive) catch crops.

On the other hand fibre crops are uneconomic compared to crops for food or biogas production. Although, regional fibre crops contribute to partial substitution of cotton, that is in the focus of public concern due to serious trouble in ecological (high pesticide application rates and very high water consumption), social and economic (poverty and hunger in export-oriented agriculture) issues.

Hemp cultivated in the winter months has the chance to solve both problems by one.

1. Previous tests indicate higher quality of hemp fibres grown in the winter months than in the summer; hence, they are adequate for textile production.
2. Hemp grown over winter is not in competition with annual crops like maize that gains highest economic revenue.
3. The deep rooting hemp reduces nitrate leaching over the winter months to a minimum like a typical catch crop.

The objective of this project is in optimizing the supply chain, the cultivation of winter-hemp and the processing to high quality elementary hemp-fibres to be spun for fine hemp-yarns.

Special hemp-decortication, degumming, bleaching and drying process will give the farmers the chance to get a second harvest. Hemp-yarns up to 50 % and Nm 34/1 are already spun.