

# DAVID BRONNER

## DR. BRONNER'S SOAPS

INTERVIEW by SIMONE FISCHER

**Tell me more about your arrest outside DEA headquarters for planting hemp seeds, and harvesting hemp plants in a cage in front of the White House?**

In 2012, I participated in a direct action protest to urge President Obama to take action in support of hemp farming legalization. I harvested seeds from hemp plants, and pressed oil from the hemp seed, while locked in a cage in front of the White House. I had a loudspeaker and signage with me in there, and spoke to the gathering crowd and Obama beyond about the need to legalize this crop in the U.S., and the outdated and misguided drug policy that made industrial hemp illegal in the first place. Eventually, the cage was cut open by firefighters and I was arrested. We feel this protest helped spur the issue of hemp legalization into the national dialog, and direct the attention of Congress to this issue. 2012 was the year we really began to see movement at the state and federal levels to implement hemp farming legislation.

**Dr. Bronner's helped fund and coordinate the hemp industry's battle to defeat DEA's regulations by winning HIA. V. DEA in 2004. How did that help prepare for the 2018 Farm Bill to exist today?**

In the HIA. V. DEA legal battle, which we won back in 2004 in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, the Federal government was forced to accept the legality of importing, manufacturing, and consuming hemp products. This was a huge step in the effort to legalize hemp farming, as this ruling protected the existence of the consumer market for hemp products in the U.S.— the largest consumer market for hemp products in the world.

This set the stage for the hemp movement to make progress in the coming decade, by establishing legal separation for industrial hemp from marijuana, working with states to setup hemp farming research programs, and working with Congress in the current Farm Bill that will remove hemp from the Controlled Substances Act entirely.

**What are your thoughts on the 2018 Farm Bill, and if it passes, how would it affect the company?**

Dr. Bronner's definitely supports the passage of the Hemp Farming Act in the 2018 Farm Bill. We feel that this versatile and sustainable crop should be legal for farmers to grow across the country, and should be regulated as a commercial crop by the USDA, just like wheat and other crops. Federal legalization of hemp would allow us to source hemp oil from American producers, rather than import it from Canada.

Passage of the Hemp Farming Amendment in the Farm Bill would provide opportunity for economic growth in our rural and agricultural communities, and would offer a new, sustainable raw material for use in many industries— including home construction, textiles and fashion, bio-plastics, food and supplements, and automobiles. At the time, only crops grown for research and experimental purposes was legal, so this crop did not supply hemp oil for our products. However, we are committed to sourcing hemp oil from American farmers as soon as the crop can be grown organically and to the scale needed to supply the millions of bottles of soap we make annually!

**When did the company begin to use hemp oil and what products use it?**

Hemp oil was added to our Castile Liquid Soaps around 2000. All our soaps, lotions, shaving soaps, balms, and hair care products, contain hemp oil. The only body care product that doesn't contain hemp, is our hand sanitizing spray. However, we are committed to sourcing hemp oil from American farmers as soon as the crop can be grown organically and to the scale needed to supply the millions of bottles of soap we make annually!



# In the spirit of the Hemp Issue, we want to shine a light on the decades of activism from David Bronner, owner of Dr. Bronner's Soap, a notoriously outspoken advocate for hemp.

Bronner caused a stir in 2013 when he was arrested outside DEA headquarters for growing hemp seeds – a radical act of protest designed to challenge the Obama administration to legalize hemp farming. Dr. Bronner's was among the first companies to bring hemp to the market on a national production scale. Beyond David's personal activism, Dr. Bronner's is one of the largest personal care companies certified under the USDA's National Organic Program, and the company pioneered the use of 100 percent post-consumer recycled plastic bottles. After growing 1,100 percent in the last 15 years, Dr. Bronner's is committed to becoming a zero-waste operation.

## How does Dr. Bronner source hemp and was it difficult to bring hemp to a production scale?

Currently, we source the hemp oil used in our body care products from Canadian farmers, mostly from Manitoba province, as organic certification is key and there is not yet much certified organic seed oil production in the US.

Canada has long understood the value of hemp as a commercial crop, and overcome antiquated laws that conflate industrial hemp with other forms of cannabis. Hence, Canada had a robust hemp industry when we began adding hemp oil to our Castile Liquid soap formula in 2000.

The DEA cannot interfere in Canadian hemp farming, however they did attempt to prevent imports of hemp products from Canada, China, and other countries, in the early 2000s. Dr. Bronner's, along with the Hemp Industries Association, Nutiva, and other early hemp adopters sued the DEA and won, establishing the legality of consumption, manufacturing and import of hemp products in 2004.

## Why don't you think it's more common for companies to move towards zero-waste operations, and how does Dr. Bronner's work to educate the everyday consumer on the importance of sustainable business practices?

More and more manufacturers in the U.S. are moving toward reducing their carbon footprint and improving the sustainability of their production methods. It's a slow process, but it's an inevitability for all as

consumers become increasingly aware of the impact of their purchases and demand more environmentally responsible and ethically produced products. Consumers want to support companies that are moving in a positive, sustainable direction, and companies that stand up against practices that contribute to climate change.

We educate consumers about the importance of sustainability in the production of our soaps through our website and social media channels. We also record information about our carbon footprint and activist causes we support, and publish that in our version of a corporate social responsibility report, our All-One Report, which you can find on our website.

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## Why should consumers support hemp businesses?

Hemp is a sustainable crop that can be used for many diverse applications— often replacing other materials or ingredients that have a bigger carbon footprint than hemp. For example, hemp is far more sustainable for use in clothing than cotton, which is one of the most chemical-intensive crops in the world. In most cases, supporting a hemp business is a consumer action anyone can take that creates demand for environmentally sustainable products.

## Will Dr. Bronner's ever source hemp grown in Oregon?

In 2013, when Kentucky became the first state to legalize industrial hemp farming at the state level, even before the Farm Bill included the Sec. 7606 Industrial Hemp Research Amendment in January of 2014, Dr. Bronner's pledged that we would begin sourcing hemp oil for our body care products as soon as it was available.

We are eager to source hemp oil from American farmers, and support the growth of this industry here in the U.S. [however] some of the challenges we face in sourcing hemp from Oregon, or any other American farm, include: 1) The USDA Organic standard in the past refused to certify organic hemp and farmers; 2) Most American farmers are entering the CBD market and not choosing to produce certified organic hemp oil; 3) and American farmers have had trouble accessing certified hemp seed that produce quality hemp seed oil.

This is all changing rapidly and we expect to be sourcing certified organic American hemp oil that meets our quality specs very soon!

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