

Banned in United States, hemp's legal in Canada

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Processing is onerous, Ms Marsh admitted, but she hopes to grow an entire hemp community alongside the crop.

Between its ecological benefits and capacity for generating jobs, embracing hemp has lots of potential, Oilseed Works founder Greg Herriott said.

For 18 years, Mr. Herriott's Barrie company has been at the vanguard, producing oil, salad dressing, flour and other hemp-based products.

Canadawide, acreage dedicated to hemp doubled between 2010 and 2011 but, aside from a 50-acre local patch, most of his hemp comes from the prairie provinces, he said.

"The market is there. The stigma is still out there, but we've come a long way," he said, touching on the elephant in the room when it comes to this particular crop.

As with marijuana, hemp is part of the cannabis family, though it contains far less of the THC that causes the former's psychoactive effects.

It can't be grown at all in the United States and to do so in Canada requires having no police record, obtaining a special permit that is renewed annually and giving the federal government the precise location of your farm, just so it can make sure you're not up to anything nefarious.

But it's not onerous enough to slow down Ms Marsh.

"Why is there such a stigma against it? I think there's been a concerted effort to equate industrial hemp with its very naughty cousin," she said.

Just as there have been forces aligned against other environmental initiatives — think "electric car" — so, too, are there vested interests against the benefits of hemp, she said.

Health Canada's red tape isn't too hard to cut through, Mr. Herriott said, adding a real challenge is the expensive land costs in the GTA and Ontario.

"I think there are opportunities here ...

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but you have to look at it realistically," he said.

Key to making it work is forming a true partnership, with the alliance able to be the overarching, driving force keeping it going, Ms Marsh said.

The plan is firstly to find a farmer willing to lend or lease the land. Mr. Herriott has already volunteered to both provide the seeds and do all the paperwork.

"I really believe in it. If we can create a strong, repeat acreage in our area, that's only a big benefit," he said.

Ms Marsh hopes her group can find 1,000 acres by next year — or even this summer — to give it a try.

If the social enterprise takes off, the alliance would be in line for a cut of any profits, but it's hardly the first thing on Ms Marsh's mind.

As with marijuana, hemp is part of the cannabis family, though it contains far less of the THC that causes the former's psychoactive effects.

She envisions local municipal fleet vehicles powered by hemp biofuel and Magna plants churning out car parts made from hemp.

The focus is primarily on industrial uses, though Ms Marsh hopes it can also be used for cottage industries, such as artisan paper.

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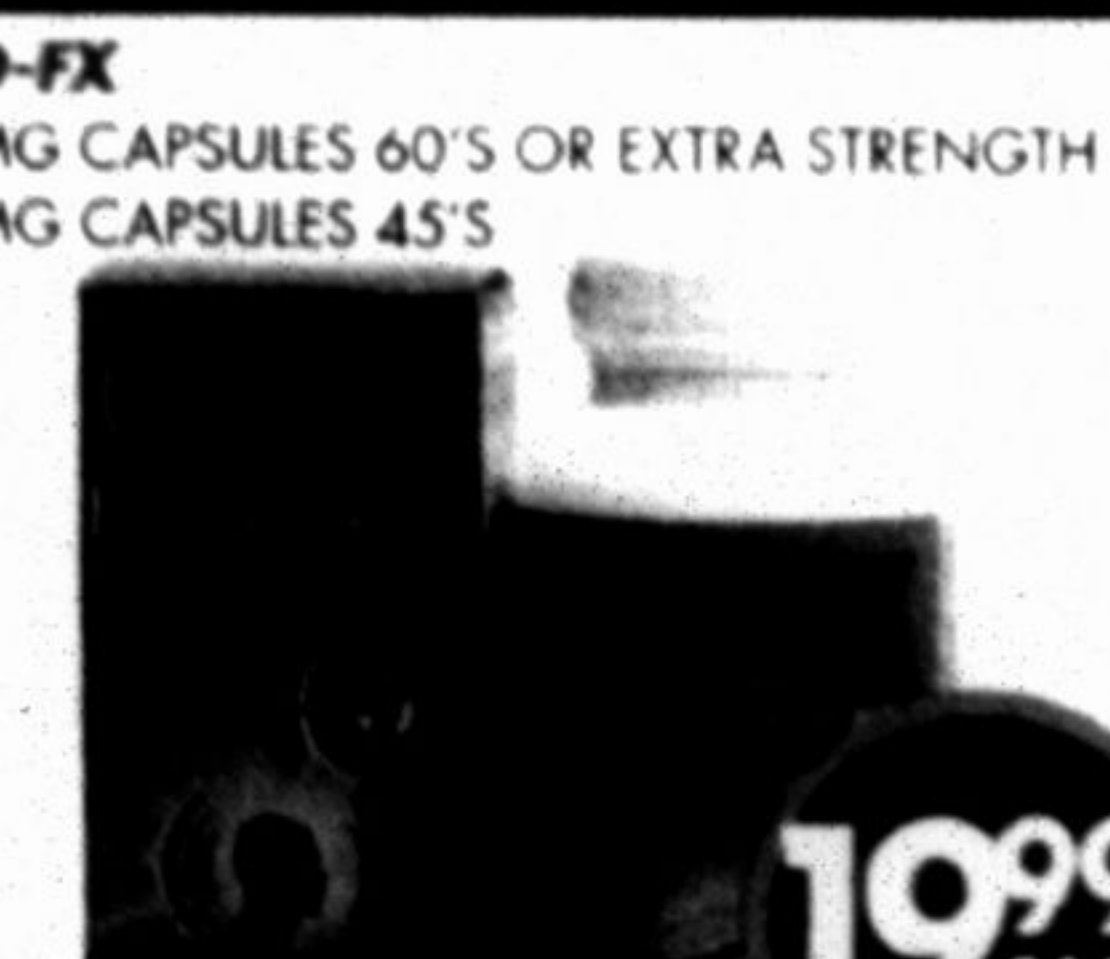
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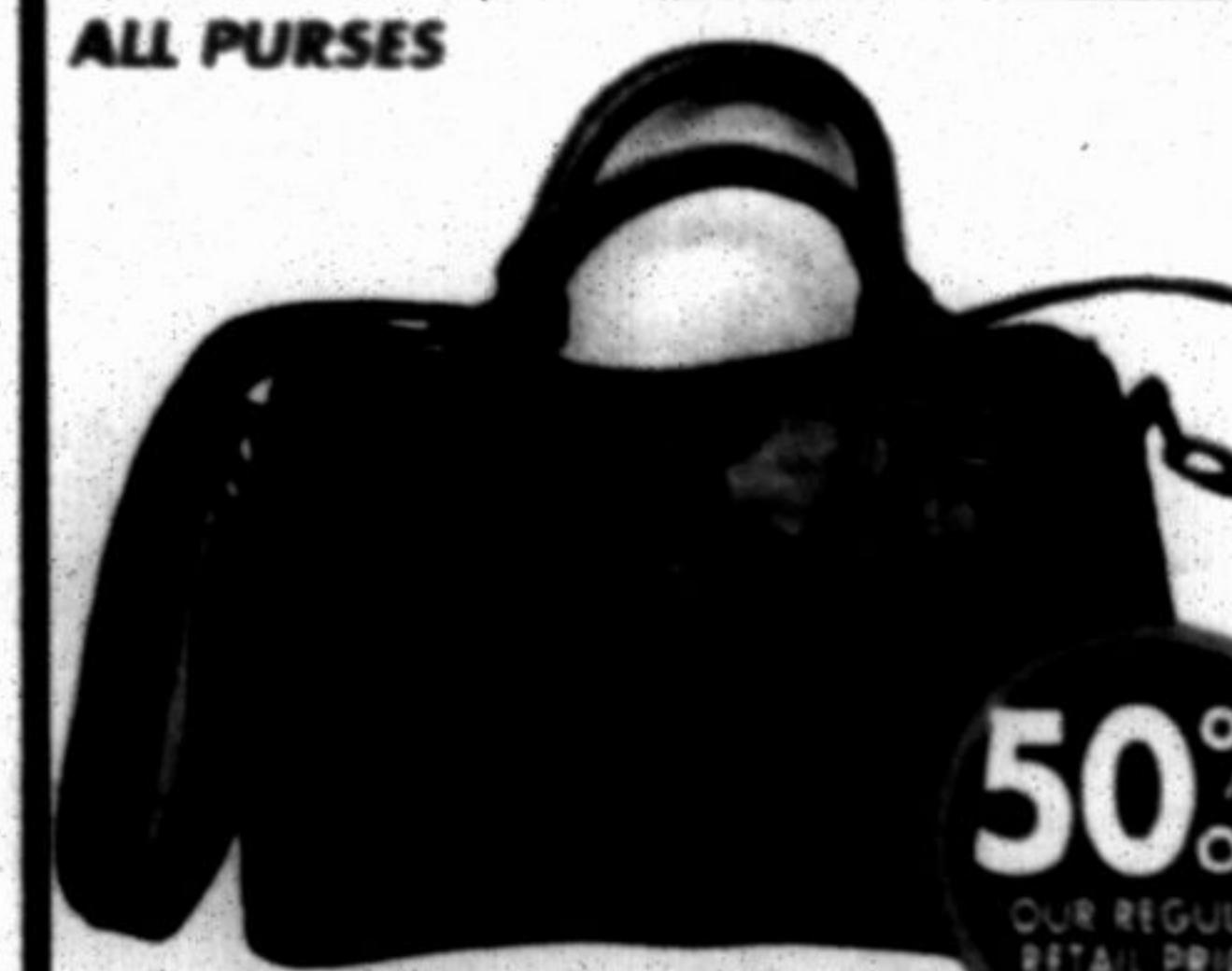
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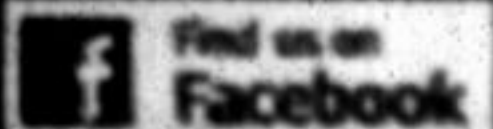
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