



HEMP HERO Part 1

This month we are excited to introduce Hemp industry maven **Paul Benhaim**. Arguably the world's foremost expert on Industrial Hemp, Paul lives right here in Australia and is gearing up to go all the way with Versativa.

*In **part one** of this two-part special feature, Paul expounds his pioneering history and discusses some of the versatile benefits offered by the amazing Hemp plant. In **part two** Paul gives us a glimpse of Hemp Farm, the World-First Eco Tourist Centre he created in Byron Bay and explains why he's taking hold of the Versativa opportunity with both hands.*

My name is Paul Benhaim, and I have been involved in the industrial hemp industry since 1993. I didn't realise it at the time but my fascination with this wonderful plant began while travelling through south east Asia and the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal. Even

though it was roughly twenty years ago the natural beauty of these places was already starting to suffer the scourge of plastic waste; wherever there were a lot of humans, large piles of plastic refuse were appearing. Whether you can see them or not these piles now exist in every part of the world and they're not getting smaller. Saddened by what I saw I've been dreaming about an end to petrochemical plastics ever since.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of my travels through places like Laos, Thailand and India was seeing the special relationship these people had with natural foods and the great health that resulted. It was the thing that brought the tribe together to re-connect before their daily tasks were carried out. Often no English was spoken, so I had plenty of observation time to appreciate the respect held for food. Despite the so-called 'poor' status in many of these places, the people were some of the happiest and healthiest I'd ever met, especially when compared with the middle-class society I grew up with in England.

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It was this realisation that led to my exploration of the nutritional qualities offered by traditional foods. Further details of this journey are found in my first book H.E.M.P. – Healthy Eating Made Possible.

Essential Eating

Throughout the years of study to follow I was repeatedly drawn back to the foundational importance of eating a diet rich with essential fatty acids in their natural form. Myself and many others like me who have done the research share an understanding that omega-3 and omega-6 essential fatty acids were KEY to explaining the longevity and health experienced by indigenous people. Conversely, it was the lack of these essential ingredients that was key to understanding the poor health experienced by so-called civilised western societies.

Next my travels took me to Canada where I walked into my very first Hemp store. The store was run by Dylan Maxwell, a man passionate about all the aspects of hemp; hemp for paper, hemp for clothing, hemp for fuel (at that time he had been running his car on hemp fuel and biodiesel for a number of years) and of course, **hemp for food!**

He certainly had my attention but *eating Hemp?* That part had me a little puzzled. Armed with a growing knowledge of nutrition I quizzed him to find out what he knew that I didn't. He talked at length about Hemp being abundant with high quality omega-3 and omega-6 essential fats. Now I was really interested. Continuing my world travels I sought out experts in the field of nutrition and fats. Meeting with the likes of Dr. Udo Erasmus (Fats That Heal, Fats

That Kill) confirmed my beliefs. When I asked Udo why he did not promote hemp seed/oil products he answered that there was a negative conception of hemp as a drug that he did not want to become involved in. He then confirmed that hemp had absolutely NO drug properties and was not illegal like cannabis in any form.

The British *Hempire*

I had heard enough. I returned back to Europe where I naively, yet eagerly offered my time as a volunteer to anyone involved with promoting the health benefits of industrial hemp seed. This eagerness was not met with success – no one was promoting hemp seed in Europe at that time. Having returned from the Himalaya I felt (and still believe) there are no limits to the possibilities that one can create. This led me to sourcing hemp seed from Hungarian farmers who had been growing it for centuries. I found myself back in the UK with a ton of hemp seed and went looking for a baker.

Based on what I had learnt about healthy traditional food on my travels, combined with what I had studied about nutrition I came up with a recipe. My goal was to create a healthy snack bar – something that contained high amounts of essential fatty acids in various natural forms, and was tasty enough that ‘normal’ people would want to eat it. I was not only successful at creating something healthy that tasted great but it also turned out to be **Europe’s first commercial hemp food product**.

After some time of selling this product to friends, and local health food stores I ventured into health food trade shows around Europe. One day in Germany I was approached by an American requesting an order which at that time I found to be massive: “how long will it take to supply me with 10,000 bars?”.

I rushed home excitedly to the baker I had been working with in Anglesey, North Wales who apologised and told me this order was too large for him but introduced me to another baker who took on production. That baker still produces the bar today. My snack bar went from a few thousand bars per year to multi-millions of bars per year and is now sold under numerous labels, in numerous countries and in every major supermarket in the UK and Europe.

The success and confidence created by this product kept me focussed on my dream of taking essential fatty acids, in the form of hemp seed to as many people as possible. I found successful brand owners and manufacturers of products including bread, pasta, sauces and other snacks and consulted with them to introduce hemp seed to their product ranges using what I had learnt about manufacturing. Slowly but surely I was successful in creating hemp seed brands for these companies and continued to support the marketing of the products.

A fun and favourite way to use hemp seeds was hemp milk. I already drank it daily and thought about creating a long-life milk for sale, similar to soy milk, only a lot more nutritious. I developed a milk on a commercial scale but was not happy with the heat treatment required

for a long life product. I didn’t give up though, I knew the hemp bar wouldn’t be my only breakthrough product. I wanted to stick with hemp milk, it had to be kept cold and like the bar had to taste great. Hemp milk...cold...delicious.....I created **the first Hemp Ice Cream!**

Mr Trippy

Most people in the UK at this time would be aware of Mr Trippy. An ice cream van I purchased and brightly painted with all the benefits of hemp seed. Sponsored by all the companies I had helped over the years, Mr Trippy and I embarked on a trip that took us around the country 15 times in the first year moving from festival to festival, event to event.



Not only was the ice cream a big hit, I found myself promoting all aspects of the industrial hemp plant – I was wearing hemp clothes, selling hemp ice cream in various flavours, hemp soups with hemp bread, hemp drinks and much more. Mr Trippy and I had great success with regular hoards of people young and old queuing for up to an hour to buy all things hemp.

During the peak of my success in the UK a friend at a local university specialising in biocomposites asked me if I had ever wanted to make a bio-plastic using hemp. Had !! This was a dream I felt that would be hard to realise without hundreds of thousands of dollars. So, during the winter when Mr Trippy went into storage I got involved in developing experimental hemp bio-plastics. I became an investor and before long we developed **the first hemp plastic material in the world** since Henry Ford originally toyed with the idea 60 years earlier.

I chose a frisbee as the first product with the idea it could be used as a business card for companies wanting to promote their eco-sustainability. I wanted to see who else was interested in using this material in larger quantities. Although only 25% hemp, the product was expensive in comparison to regular plastics and at that time there was little market acceptance.

I believed a new method of marketing was required, so I produced CD and DVD cases from hemp plastic. I promoted these to the likes of Madonna, Sting, Michael Franti and others who seemed to believe in environmental sustainability. Having spent a good deal of money on this, I soon realised the basic truth of our world economy – it's money driven! If it costs more, music artist management were not interested.

Standing up for my beliefs I created two music cd's based around the 100% hemp didgeridoo including printed inserts on hemp paper and packaged in hemp plastic cd cases. They are still selling well today!

Hemp - No Way!

In the year 2000 I was head-hunted by a Brisbane based company with big dreams for hemp. They wanted me to start Hemp Foods Australia. Despite the legislation for hemp foods in Australia creating challenges I had not yet faced I accepted so I could once again support the growth of hemp foods in a new country from the ground up. I worked with manufacturers in various states and created a new improved ice-cream, new snack bars and worked with very well known mainstream Australian and multi-national brand names for the potential of hemp breads, hemp milk and more. I was also successful at gaining written interest by all the supermarket chains in Australia that as soon as the legislation changed they would get behind Hemp.

All seemed fine and I felt so at home in Australia I had my first child Jarien here whose mother ate significant amounts of hemp seed oil leading up to and after his birth. After a few years though the rapid success I was used to just was not happening. The Australian Hemp legislation did not seem like changing. **Australia is still today (2011) the last western country in the world to allow hemp seed as a food**, despite the Australian and New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) 4 year study that confirmed it was safe and good for the Australian people.

A hand written note by the then Prime Minister John Howard '**Hemp, No Way**' seemed to veto the years of lobbying that had gained us the support of most state governments and their ministers.

I didn't sit still however. I wrote a book on Living Food Recipes, produced a TV series DVD

Not The Cooking Show, facilitated retreats in Australia and Indonesia and ran a 5 star health resort. I also assisted others in setting up sustainable communities.



Taking Green To the Mainstream

Around this time I also set up a hemp oil based cosmetic range. Your skin is your largest organ, so why not get people to ingest hemp oil legally through their skin? I created a multi-level marketing business for hemp oil products from the ground up. I wrote hundreds of pages of documents supporting the products and created teams of people around the country who were passionate about growing this range.

A time came however when my manufacturing partner was not interested in getting larger, taking on shareholders etc meanwhile my interest was always in taking Hemp BIG, I wanted

to take hemp to the mainstream, so I left her with the business which continues successfully to this day, albeit as a small wholesale/retail business.

Following this yet another opportunity came my way. This time to commercialise a material that I believed would change the world. After a year of study I put all my focus into this new venture called 'Zelfo' – a 100% cellulose-based (hemp or waste paper) biodegradable material that required no glues or resins. I raised over \$1m and built a ground-breaking, highly unique manufacturing facility. The team I had were great and we managed to start producing a range of high value objects that we thought would take the world by storm and get everyone wanting to produce the material globally.

By 2008 it became apparent that successfully commercialising this material would require a joint venture with a large corporation and possibly the production of a \$15m pilot plant to demonstrate viability. This is when I ran out of cash and was forced to pass the baton on to others with bigger pockets. I hope this material succeeds one day.

Since that time I have authored many books on Hemp as food, fuel, construction material, clothing etc and created a national think tank and chamber of commerce called the Australian Hemp Foundation.

As well as working with hemp building (www.thehempbuilder.com) my main focus for the last year has been to support other's become successful with Hemp and get Hemp into the mainstream using the course of least resistance.

I now consult to others interested in setting up their own hemp business or brand. This is usually an existing business interested in an eco range, someone new to business, a larger corporation wanting an independent specialist knowledgeable about hemp and eco marketing, or an existing hemp company want to streamline, expand and increase their profits. More details at www.startahempbusiness.com

My latest projects involve re-launching Hemp Foods Australia and growing the market for hemp seeds in anticipation of legislation changing in Australia.

Tune in to Part 2 of Paul's story in our next newsletter including his exciting involvement with Versativa. Anyone wanting to purchase nutritionally dense hemp seeds can do so by visiting www.hempfoods.com.au