Tasmania readies for great leap in hemp area

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PLANS to grow more than 8000ha of hemp across Tasmania in the next few years are now in place.

After long-awaited changes to legislation governing the use of hemp seed, Tasmanian farmers are getting on board with the burgeoning industry.
This year around 1600ha of hemp is being grown in Tasmania, with a farm gate value of $4.5 million.

Demand for hemp seed is skyrocketing and with an ideal climate, access to water and experiences growers, the state is well placed to take advantage of the booming market.

Tasmanian Hemp Association president Tim Schmidt said the industry was looking for steady growth over the next few years to help increase supplies of hemp seed.

“The companies operating here have got orders we need to fill, otherwise there’s a risk they could be filled by imported seed,” he said.

“There’s an opportunity here for hemp to become a really important crop.

“The last thing we want is for people to have a bad experience with hemp. The key thing we’re looking for is growers to give is a go and then keep growing it year after year.”

Average seed yields across the state are one tonne per hectare, the highest nationally.

Some top crops have yielded as much as 1.5 tonnes a hectare and Mr Schmidt said there was room for improvement in this area.

“As the agronomy side of things improves and we have new genetic material coming on board there’s the potential to increase yields quite a bit.”

There are currently three companies growing and purchasing hemp seed in Tasmania.

Mr Schmidt said as the volumes increased, there would also be opportunities to develop more value-adding.

Tasmania currently grows almost two thirds of the Australian hemp crop.

A national peak body, the Australian Hemp Growers Council, has recently been formed and Mr Schmidt is the Tasmanian representative.

The THA is also working with the State Government to amend legislation to allow for the sale of hemp crop residues as mulch.

Next Friday a field day will be held in Deloraine at Woodlands, 405 Mole Creek Rd. The open day will include a two-hour session run from 10am to noon and again from 1pm.
Speakers include Gail Stubber from a Western Australian grower group, Jamie Milling from Canna Hemp Care, Ted Jones from local company Red Agri and Tim Crow from Hemp Harvest. Participants can inspect hemp crops, including new variety trials.