

U.S. Senate Votes To Legalize Hemp After Decades-Long Ban Under Marijuana Prohibition

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The non-psychoactive cannabis cousin of marijuana would finally become legal to grow in the United States under a bill overwhelmingly approved by the Senate.



Photo by Chris Wallis // Side Pocket Images

The wide-ranging agriculture and food policy legislation known as the Farm Bill, passed by a vote of 86 - 11 on Thursday, contains provisions to legalize the cultivation, processing and sale of industrial hemp.

The move, championed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), would also make hemp plants eligible for crop insurance.

"Consumers across America buy hundreds of millions in retail products every year that contain hemp," McConnell said in a floor speech on Thursday. "But due to outdated federal regulations that do not sufficiently distinguish this industrial crop from its illicit cousin, American farmers have been mostly unable to meet that demand themselves. It's left consumers with little choice but to buy imported hemp products from foreign-produced hemp."

McConnell also took to the Senate floor on Tuesday and Wednesday to [tout the bill's hemp legalization provisions](#) in separate speeches.

In April, the GOP leader introduced standalone [legislation to legalize hemp](#), the Hemp Farming Act, the provisions of which were [included in the larger Farm Bill](#) when it was unveiled earlier this month.

The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry [approved the bill](#) by a vote of 20-1 two weeks ago.

During that committee markup, Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA), one of Congress's most ardent opponents of marijuana law reform, threatened to pursue serious changes to the bill's hemp provisions on the floor. Namely, he wanted to remove the legalization of derivatives of the cannabis plant, such as cannabidiol (CBD), which is used by many people for medical purposes. But Grassley never ended up filing a floor amendment, allowing hemp supporters to avoid a contentious debate and potentially devastating changes to the bill.