U.S. Hemp Fiber and Fabric Imports

No data are available on imports or exports of hemp seed and oil into the United States, but data do exist on hemp fiber, yarn, and fabrics.

Imports of raw hemp fiber have increased dramatically in the last few years, rising from less than 500 pounds in 1994 to over 1.5 million pounds for the first 9 months of 1999 (table 1). Yarn imports also have risen substantially, peaking at slightly less than 625,000 pounds in 1997. The switch from yarn to raw fiber in the last 2 years probably reflects the development of U.S. spinning capacity. At least two companies are now spinning hemp yarn from imported fibers (Gross, 1997). According to industry sources, domestic spinning capacity for hemp was not available earlier in the decade. No direct information is available on the uses of the yarn, but it is likely used to manufacture apparel, household furnishings, and/or floor coverings.

A separate import code for hemp fabrics was added to the Harmonized Tariff Schedule in 1995, so only a few years of data are available. Imports more than doubled from over 222,000 pounds in 1995 to about 523,000 pounds in 1998. The volume dropped for the first 9 months of 1999, again probably reflecting domestic production of hemp-containing fabrics. China is the largest supplier of hemp fabric to the United States, followed by Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Data are not available on how much hemp clothing and household furnishings are imported into the United States.

Imports of tow and yarn waste have declined since the late 1980’s and early 1990’s and have varied from year to year (table 1). No direct information is available on the uses of hemp tow and yarn waste. However, both hemp and flax are bast fibers and flax tow and yarn wastes are byproducts of linen processing and spinning. Since the main use of flax tow and waste is in specialty papers, hemp tow and waste may be used for the same purpose.

The United States also exports hemp raw fiber, tow and yarn waste, and yarn. During 1997-99, hemp exports were around 10 percent of imports. The data for earlier years, however, are suspect as exports of raw fiber are unexplainably larger than imports.

A full discussion of world production and trade of hemp fiber and seed can be found in Charest (1998) and Vantreese (1998). Wang and Shi (1999) also review the decade-long decrease in world hemp fiber production and highlight China’s critical role in declining world production and exports. Dempsey (1975) and Ehrensing (1998) provide historic information on world fiber production.

Table 1—U.S. hemp imports, by category, 1989-99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Raw fiber</th>
<th>Tow and yarn waste</th>
<th>Yarn</th>
<th>Total fiber, tow/waste, and yarn</th>
<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Total¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>166,200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>166,200</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>166,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>74,697</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>75,239</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>127,429</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>129,462</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>129,462</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>15,410</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>16,402</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>16,848</td>
<td>16,969</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>6,989</td>
<td>11,570</td>
<td>18,122</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>14,844</td>
<td>7,754</td>
<td>8,181</td>
<td>30,779</td>
<td>222,495</td>
<td>253,274</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>72,991</td>
<td>43,568</td>
<td>12,899</td>
<td>129,458</td>
<td>291,517</td>
<td>420,975</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>193,535</td>
<td>13,340</td>
<td>624,682</td>
<td>831,557</td>
<td>451,174</td>
<td>1,282,731</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>708,918</td>
<td>73,471</td>
<td>149,447</td>
<td>931,836</td>
<td>522,789</td>
<td>1,454,625</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999²</td>
<td>1,587,674</td>
<td>35,170</td>
<td>65,927</td>
<td>1,688,771</td>
<td>201,650</td>
<td>1,890,421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

na = Not available. A separate import code for hemp fabrics was added in 1995.
² January to September.