

## Food

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### **Hemp** **A unique flavor — and good for you, too**

Laura LaRocca

Long known for its strength and durability in products like clothing and paper, hemp might prove to be just as beneficial in another medium: food.

Turns out, hemp is a leading source of protein (especially beneficial for vegetarians and vegans), it contains all 10 essential amino acids, it's high in fiber, and it tastes good, too, if an acquired taste.

Christina Volgyesi, originally from Canada but now living in Portland, Ore., stumbled upon hemp protein powder during a trip home after never having seen it in the States.

"I really just became amazed," she said during a recent phone interview.

She and her husband began experimenting with hemp seeds, making their own hemp milk in a blender. They added sweeteners, like agave nectar and honey, until they found a recipe they liked.

Soon after, they became the founding partners of Living Harvest, a company that now offers an array of hemp products, including hemp milk in five flavors (original, unsweetened original, vanilla, unsweetened vanilla and chocolate).

In April, they'll launch their ice cream line.

"I've always been interested in nutrition as a way of life," said Volgyesi, now the vice president of marketing for the company.

Because hemp farming is illegal in the U.S., the company imports its hemp seeds from Canada, where hemp, in general, is more widely accepted.



Volgyesi said the raw nuts, which they sell, taste similar to walnuts and can be sprinkled on salad and put in yogurt or cookies.

Hemp protein powder, unique for its high fiber content, unlike whey or soy protein powder, can be used for shakes and smoothies.

She said hemp milk "steams fabulously" and makes a great latte.

"There's a huge trend in unsweetened beverages," Volgyesi said. "People can sweeten to their own preference."

My Organic Market (MOM) in Frederick carries both Living Harvest and Manitoba Harvest hemp milk.

Flaxseed oil is often prescribed by nutritionists for people wanting to get more essential fatty acids in their diet, but Margaret Hluch, demo chef at MOM and customer service clerk, said hempseed oil is just as good for the cause.

"Not everyone can convert flaxseeds into their body," said Lissa Butler, Wellness associate at MOM and also an herbal practitioner. "Hemp is easier for us to assimilate."

"And it tastes better," Hluch added.

As far as other non-dairy milk products, hemp has almost three times the amount of Omega 3's as soy milk and double the amount of Omega 6's, Volgyesi said.

Consumers may also try hemp products because they are allergic to dairy or soy or nuts, eliminating milk, soy milk and almond milk from their list of options. Hemp is not a known allergen.

Hemp milk has a nuttier flavor than soy milk, but it might take some getting used to (remember the switch from milk to soy milk?). Hemp milk is thicker than most soy milks and, it goes without saying, much thicker than rice milks or rice/soy combinations.

Other hemp products can be found at MOM and at The Common Market in Frederick, including shelled hempseed, hemp protein powder (with comes as both a raw, whole food and also roasted), hempseed butter, hemp bread (rumored to be very tasty, though not gluten free) hempseed oil.

Amanda Johnson, Wellness manager at MOM, said hemp oil is good for skin, memory and joints.

Butler added that hemp oil contains GLA, which is helpful for women's issues, like mood swings.

Hemp also contains chlorophyll, known for its detoxification benefits.

Whether consumers are looking for ways to beat allergies, get healthy fats in their diet or simply eat a wider variety of foods, hemp is a unique way to do so.

"It's been exciting to see the adoption of hemp," Volgyesi said.

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