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

Year	Raw fiber	Tow and yarn waste	Yarn	Total fiber, tow/waste, and yarn	Fabric	Total[1]
			Pounds			
1989	0	166,200	0	166,200	na	166,200
1990	0	74,697	542	75,239	na	75,239
1991	1,900	127,429	132	129,462	na	129,462
1992	904	15,410	88	16,402	na	16,402
1993	0	121	16,848	16,969	na	16,969
1994	463	6,089	11,570	18,122	na	18,122
1995	14,844	7,754	8,181	30,779	222,495	253,274
1996	72,991	43,568	12,899	129,458	291,517	420,975
1997	193,535	13,340	624,682	831,557	451,174	1,282,731
1998	708,918	73,471	149,447	931,836	522,789	1,454,625
1999[2]	1,587,674	35,170	65,927	1,688,771	201,650	1,890,421

na = Not available. A separate import code for hemp fabrics was added in 1995.
[1] Includes fabric for 1995-99.
[2] January to September.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census.