

2.5 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville of the Minister for the Environment regarding pharmaceutical crops grown in Jersey: 1(399)

Given that work has previously been undertaken on advancing the concept of pharmaceutical crops being grown in Jersey, will the Minister explain if this matter is still being researched and, if so, whether any progress has been made in this respect?

[10:15]

The Deputy of St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

In 2015 my department commissioned the National Non-Food Crop Centre to research the viability of producing high value, low volume but not specifically pharmaceutical crops in Jersey. This work was borne out of concerns over potato production sustainability, rising potato cyst nematode levels, marketing and water quality issues and my own desire to diversify the viability of our countryside. Consequently, 3 reports identified a list of crops, suitable for production in Jersey, for which there is a demand in the market. As a result, it was agreed to include alternative crops research in the Rural Economy Strategy approved by this Assembly earlier this year. A number of initiatives are currently underway, although none are specifically pharmaceutical at this stage.

2.5.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Does the Minister envisage ... I mean he has just said none are pharmaceutical at this stage, but there is a particular need in the Island for medicinal cannabis of which it should include C.B.D. (Cannabidiol) and T.H.C. (Tetrahydrocannabinol) elements that provide particular relief to those who suffer pain on a daily basis and, in some cases, is used to treat certain cancers. Can he give some comfort to those people in the Island that this is being advanced - medicinal cannabis is on his agenda - and if he envisaged, or if he can give this Assembly a timeframe when it could be introduced?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I did mention earlier that we have some initiatives ongoing. Those include honeyberry, haskap berries, which I think are going to be the new superfruit. We have a small plantation at the Howard Davis Farm. We currently have 2 new tea producers on the Island. Tea consumption is on the up and I am very confident that that is going to be successful. Members will also know that we are currently growing hemp as a trial in the Island. Hemp is a constituent to what the Deputy is referring to. I am grateful for the Minister for Health and Social Services for granting that permit to grow hemp. I think that could be very good in the future. But the hemp that we are growing does not have the T.H.C. involved in it that the Deputy refers to. I can say to her that, yes, I have discussed this with officers. It is not quite as simple as: "Can we grow the crop?" because obviously, yes, we can. It is security issues and it is other issues around that that need to be addressed before we could move that forward. But I understand her concerns. There is a need for this type of product and I will undertake to get back to her again with some more thoughts. But I can assure her that we have thought about it although at the moment it is not moving forward.

2.5.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Can I have an assurance from the Minister that we shall not be growing oil seed rape?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Oil seed rape is not one that has been identified as part of a long list of crops which we might grow as alternatives in the Island. Certainly, oil seed rape is grown extensively in the U.K. and

the economies of scale will apply. I think it very unlikely that it would be economical to grow that product on the Island.

2.5.3 The Deputy of Grouville:

I welcome the Minister's offer to be kept informed, as I have some constituents who are very concerned about this, very keen to advance medicinal cannabis, obviously because some are, as I alluded to in my first supplementary, in pain on a daily basis. So, I would be very grateful to be kept in the loop and possibly have a meeting with the Minister, at some time, to help advance this.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I will just reiterate to the Deputy. I will confer, not only with the Minister for Health and Social Services, but also the Minister for Home Affairs and see how we can move this forward.