

# Spotlight on Janet Currie, Valley Stock Farms, Growing Hemp and Growing a Business

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Janet Currie, owner of Valley Stock Farms, started growing hemp for its Cannabidiols (CBD) when industrial hemp became legal to grow in 2019. With her crop meeting the standards of [Vermont's Hemp Program](#), she successfully secured buyers for all 3,200 of the plants she had grown on her farm in Orwell, Vermont. She dried the plants in her barn, milled and bagged them and sold them in twenty-five 250 lb bags.

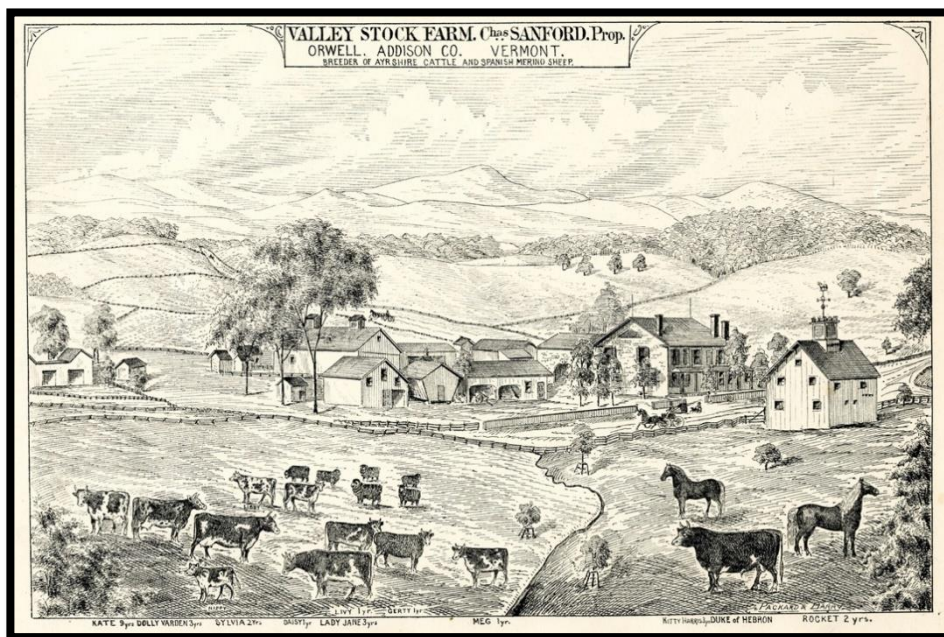
Other hemp growers in Vermont have not been so successful at securing buyers over the past two years, resulting in waning enthusiasm for growing hemp. In 2021, Vermont had 336 registered growers; in 2022, it was 89 (as of July 20, 2022). A drop of 74%.

Janet describing this hemp boom and bust, said, “People did so many crazy things that first year –for instance using a combine when the hemp was wet and macerating it and then wrapping it. They ended up with a moldy smelly mess. Hemp processing failed miserably, and farmers lost their shirts.”

With a degree in genetics, Janet has put her science and quantitative skillset to use. As she told me, “I did a lot of research. I didn't grow as much myself that year.” Janet's advice is still “Grow what you can sufficiently [dry](#).”

I asked Janet how she found her buyers and started her business. Janet said, “When I was calling people to buy my biomass, I contacted agricultural agencies in other states to get information on their hemp growers, processors, and other brokers who represented the processors.” While undertaking this market research, Janet discovered other farmers looking for processors and processors looking for crops.

Spotting the need for brokerage services, Janet started her biomass business in 2020 working with two other women, one based in Chicago and the other in Oregon. Both helped expand Janet's network to include many large farms in the West as well as bringing an export license for overseas sales to her business. Janet's business has grown to include large transactions between buyers and sellers from different states. For example, one sale was based on Janet brokering 225,000 lbs of biomass from a Colorado grower to sell to a processor in Tennessee. Since 2020, Janet has



*Above photo of Valley Stock Farm lithograph, courtesy of Janet Currie.*

brokered over a 1.5 million pounds of biomass. Building on that success, Janet is starting an auction house.

Janet's business niche is being quick at honing in on a sales price which works for both parties, As she says, "I find out what a farmer wants, what a processor wants; it's a little bit of a dance as the processor wants to buy low and the farmer wants to sell high. She knows the needs of processors, for example, some want the hemp milled, others don't. Some need expedited shipping and others can wait. The art and science of brokerage is matching the need of growers and processors.

This past year, 2022, Janet was ready to diversify her business. She has since registered to grow fiber.

## Growing Hemp for Fiber

Janet heard Travis Samuels talking about his new Vermont-based business [Zion Growers](#) on a [recorded webinar](#). This piqued her interest in growing hemp for fiber. She heard how industrial hemp varieties grown for fiber could be part of a value-added chain for many innovative products and how hemp farmers could benefit from selling or partnering with a processor which has business plan for growth.

As Janet said, "In the beginning of May 2022, I really wanted to get some seeds, but this spring was a little tricky. I didn't know whether we'd get a late frost like 2019 which was a nightmare. It was really warm in May, but June was cold. We were worried we would have another 2019 season."

Janet waited to see what the weather forecast would be for a planting window. When the forecast looked good, she said, "I met Travis on Friday, picked up five bags containing 50,000 seeds per bag from him, and got the seeds in the ground on Monday."

Aware of nearby hemp farmers growing flowers for CBD, Janet identified a site with a 10-mile radius to buffer any possibility that her plants could pollinate female hemp plants which reduces the amount of CBD produced. Not only the location, but the timing is critical as hemp varieties grown for fiber will typically flower before other hemp plants grown for CBD.

Far enough from farms growing for CBD including her own farm property in Orwell, Janet partnered with her friend Jeff Sheldon, who had hundreds of acres of corn fields in Fairhaven. He was happy to lease five acres to try a new hemp variety grown for fiber.

## Hemp Fiber Field Facts

- Location – Airport Road, Fairhaven, VT
- Size – 5 acres
- Soil type – clay
- Prepped for corn and previous crop – corn
- Seeded with no-till drill at on May 23, 2022
- Plants flowered by July 25.
- 2022 growing season in Rutland County– [abnormally dry](#)
- Harvest Date: August 10, 2022. (90 days after planting)
- Plant Height: 100 to 165 cm
- Stem Diameter: 0.4 to 0.7 cm
- 7 bales of biomass (800 lbs per bale) harvested
- Processing planned with Zion Growers in [Vermont Marble Museum building, 52 Main Street in Proctor](#).

**Note:** The typical seeding rate used by hemp fiber growers is between 40 and 60 lbs ac<sup>-1</sup>. See UVM Extension trials at [uvm.edu/extension/nwcrops/research](http://uvm.edu/extension/nwcrops/research)



*Janet Currie, Valley Stock Farms and Travis Samuels, co-owner of Zion Growers, pleased with how the crop has turned out given how little rain Rutland County received this growing season. Photo Credit: Suzy Hodgson.*

[Harvest day](#) at the Fairhaven field in August drew an interested crowd including Lyle Jepton, the executive director of the Chamber and Economic Development of the Rutland Region, Mike DiTomasso, Hemp Program Inspector with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and Suzy Hodgson, Sustainable Agriculture, University of Vermont Extension. Suzy commented, “We could see the potential of economic development in industrial hemp and its many value-added products and services.” A hemp crop can potentially bring in more revenue than corn and doesn’t require much more in time and costs in terms of equipment or management practices. Mike added, “I am hopeful that fiber hemp will be a valuable rotational crop in Vermont and see the potential in incorporating hemp as a way to diversify revenue streams and to build soil health for farmers across Vermont.”

Suzy asked Janet about what she’d learned over this past summer. Trying a new crop in a new marketplace, Janet has built up her knowledge and skills by networking and attending UVM Extension’s Northwest Crops & Soils Field Day at Border View Farm. Janet said,

“I had opportunity to network, see hands-on work with hemp, and talk to individuals who were well-versed in genetic strains. I saw the exhibit on hempcrete. I learned from books, but seeing applied research on the farm was perfect for me. And Vermont’s Secretary of Agriculture, Food, and Markets sat next to me at lunch. His being there tells me that there’s a high level of interest in what we’re trying to accomplish.”

## **Janet’s Advice – From One Farmer to Another when Growing Hemp for Fiber or Grain**

People growing hemp are on the learning curve. Janet tells me, “Farmers need to have better understanding of what growing hemp requires. I’ve met farmers who don’t know what a COA is and that they need one.”

A COA is a [Certificate of Analysis](#) from a certified laboratory which details the chemical analysis of a hemp harvest lot.

- Don’t put plants in ground that you don’t have a buyer for.
- Time your planting based on the variety and type of hemp you want to grow.
- Do soil tests. [See UVM soil testing lab and contact](#).
- Irrigation may not be necessary. “We don’t have drip tape and didn’t rely on irrigation.”
  - Growing on clay can work when an area with moisture is identified. “We found plants grow on clay when there are pockets which can help when weather’s dry.”
- Cutting with disc mower works well.
- Do not plant more than you can dry and store.

For hemp fiber variety trials and results, check out [UVM Extension Northwest Crops & Soils Program](#), [2021 Industrial Hemp Fiber Variety Trial](#).

Janet and Travis are looking forward to 2023 for the hemp fiber business and new opportunities. As Janet tells me, “I want other farms to see this crop. It looks like it’s working, so we’re going to plant 400 acres next year.”

The end of 2022 marks a new phase for Vermont hemp production. In January 1, 2023, farmers who wish to cultivate hemp and operate in compliance with federal law will be required to have a license issued under the [U. S. Domestic Hemp Production Program](#). Given weather impacts, regulatory changes and marketing challenges, Janet reflected, “Well, it’s been bumpy ride, it’s been a dirt road for a while, let’s make the ride smoother.”



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