

Windsor-Essex chamber wants input during legalization process of marijuana



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A worker trims marijuana plants on Feb. 18, 2016, at the Aphria greenhouses in Leamington, Ont. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*

There is a push on to make sure the Windsor area is at the forefront when Canada legalizes the recreational use of marijuana, and it's coming from a surprising source.

The Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce wants input when the federal legislation is drafted to ensure the area gets its fair share of the potential \$5-billion dollar industry.

"We have an emerging cannabis marketplace and we want to be at the forefront in the industry for whatever the future holds," Matt Marchand, CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said Thursday.

"Windsor-Essex is a global leader in agricultural production and research. We have skilled talent in the agricultural community, so we want to make sure the economic benefits for Essex County are maximized."

The chamber wants a business framework put in place so the industry does not become a "wild west" with a grey market undercutting the commercial industry.

"It has to be clear who does what, also what is legal and what is not," Marchand said.

Leamington-based Aphria already has a strong presence in the medical marijuana sector after securing a licence in November 2014 with Health Canada. The company generates annual revenues of about \$8 million and has said it plans to be ready to enter the market when marijuana is legalized for recreational use.

The Windsor-Essex chamber and the Greater Niagara chamber are looking for support to take their message about the looming marijuana legislation to Ottawa. They will present a resolution at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce general meeting in Regina, which starts Sept. 17.

The resolution calls on Ottawa to "implement a regulatory framework that will allow competition and consumer choice while also protecting consumers, the public, and youth."

If two-thirds of the chambers across the country approve, the Windsor-Essex chamber will be able to make its case to the federal government.

The Trudeau government has promised to legalize recreational marijuana use and is expected to table legislation in the spring, Marchand said.

“We don’t want any ambiguity on who can produce what,” he said. “We want to be at the table when legislation is introduced and have the opportunity for input.”

The local chamber won’t just be talking pot at the annual meeting.

It is also championing a resolution with the Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie chambers calling for greater protection of Canada’s steel industry.

They want the federal government to address “unfair trade practices” which they say have allowed nations such as China to undercut steel prices in Canada.

While Hamilton and the Sault are where the majority of Canadian steel manufacturing takes place, Atlas Tube, which has a plant in Harrow, is the country’s largest producer of steel hollow structural sections.

“There are foreign governments gaming the trade system,” Marchand said. “There is an overcapacity of steel globally due mostly to China. It is being dumped not just in Canada, but globally.”

Steel shipments often enter this country using fake certificates or through third-party nations, allowing countries such as China to steer around the rules, Marchand said.

“Trade enforcement laws in Canada date back 20 years and need to be updated,” he said.

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