

A match made in hemp

CBD, an extract of cannabis, has been touted as a revolutionary new dietary product that could be the perfect partner for coffee. **Anna Sulan Masing** investigates

Photography **Gary Smith**

There has been a global culture shift in the last few years around cannabis. Legalisation and widespread medical use, particularly across the US, has brought attention to the plant and products derived from it. So what can we expect to happen in future? How will the UK react to shifting attitudes overseas? And, with new products appearing all the time, will that have an effect on the beverage market – specifically coffee?

In the UK, CBD oil is the most popular legally accessible part of the cannabis plant for consumption. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the principle psychoactive compound in cannabis – what gets you high – but cannabidiol, or CBD, is one of 104 cannabinoid compounds that do not have that affect. The most popular way of administering CBD is extracting it and combining it with a carrier oil. This appears in many products, from skincare to food and beverages, and is beginning to make waves in the coffee world.

However, CBD occupies a legally indistinct position in the UK. Under the terms of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, CBD can be sold and purchased as long as its THC levels are under 0.2%. But recent Home Office rulings have caused some confusion for hemp farmers. For example, this summer Hempen Co-operative in Oxfordshire lost its licence to grow hemp and was made to destroy an entire crop. Previously it had been

legal to harvest seed and stalk to make CBD. Hempen's Ali Silk says, "Users can buy it from the high street or online, and businesses can import it. But, no licensed hemp farmer in the UK is allowed to grow hemp for CBD, and they have to destroy the flowers and leaves – the parts we'd use to extract CBD."

Margent Farm in Cambridgeshire was also obliged to destroy around £100,000 worth of organic CBD during this year's harvest. "The UK imports all of its CBD, so the law telling us to destroy it all feels very short-sighted and hypocritical," says Margent's Fawnda Denham. "We're calling on the government to help us progress rapidly from lagging behind the rest of the world and realise the potential of the entire plant."

But CBD products are legal, or at least not illegal. Gemma Colao, co-founder of OTO CBD, a wellness company specialising in CBD, explains that they're governed by the EU's complicated Novel Food Regulations. "This considers all cannabis-derived extracts to be 'novel', so all foods, supplements and drinks containing CBD are unauthorised. But enforcing the rules is down to individual member states, and so far the UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has not enforced this." Gemma believes this means the industry will be given space to develop – but nothing is guaranteed.

Law and order

So is it worthwhile for producers and suppliers to continue to navigate

through this red tape? What does CBD offer to the consumer and what is the value for suppliers?

CBD is seen as a possible bedfellow for coffee because it might balance some of caffeine's negative effects. "CBD is proving to be an effective way to reduce anxiety and put people into a calmer state of mind due to the effect it has on the endocannabinoid system," says Henry Baldwin, co-founder of Signature CBD. "Combining the two can give you a lift and reduce any side-effects you may experience from caffeine."

Ali from Hemper echoes this. "CBD has been shown to have a calming effect in the body, so it stands to reason that it could potentially soften any harsh effects from a cup of coffee."

It might seem natural to put CBD in your coffee, but James Wise at Assembly Coffee cautions against this. "You would be waiting for your stomach to digest it, which might take longer than the 'jittery' effects of coffee take to arrive. The timing would be mismatched, the control is not there." The most commonly recommended way of ingesting CBD is drops under your tongue, which allows the CBD to get into your system almost immediately.

Known unknowns

There is a lack of specific research within the field of CBD and beverages. "There are contradictory reports on the impact of CBD in coffee or tea, such as the effect of heat on CBD and around

THANKS TO FAWNDA DENHAM AND THE TEAM AT MARGENT FARM (MARGENTFARM.COM)



CBD AND COFFEE

consistency of dose. More research is needed,” says OTO’s Gemma.

There’s also a lot of misinformation around, which is a concern for some of the suppliers and experts who spoke with *Caffeine*. “Myths are easily perpetuated – people should be looking for scientific research and peer-reviewed journals to understand CBD,” Ali says. “In the UK, CBD sellers are unable to make any medical claims, so buyers should watch out for claims being made when the product is just a supplement and not a medical product.”

Like any product, it is about sourcing, processes and attention to detail. “A recent test by Phytovista Labs in the UK found almost 50% of the CBD products on the market were illegal, either by containing less than advertised CBD or measurable amounts of THC,” says Tony Johnston of The Leaf Co Full Spectrum CBD Coffee. “We believe that the whole CBD industry requires further legislation and certification.”

Prime administer

Ali believes it is important to use a full-spectrum CBD. “The benefits come from the whole plant working together – there are around 120 other beneficial cannabinoids, as well as phytonutrients and terpenes, that all work synergistically to enhance the impact of the plant on your body. This is called the ‘entourage effect’.”

On the other hand, OTO’s Gemma chooses to use a CBD isolate because of legal complications around the traces of THC and other cannabinoids. “We source from trusted partners who provide exceptional quality CBD isolate. CBD isolate is created through a CO₂ extraction process that removes all of the oils, plant material, waxes, chlorophyll, and more, leaving behind the pure cannabidiol. This way we can be 100% clear what our customers are getting.”

There are multiple ways to combine CBD with coffee. The Leaf Co has chosen to roast the raw coffee beans with CBD oil. “If you put CBD oil drops into a cup of coffee you are left with the oil floating to the surface and residue left around the edges of the cup,” Tony says. “By roasting it with the beans there is none of this and the taste is exceptional. It also means that we can test and certify – independently – that our coffee has 10mg of CBD per 10g serving of coffee.”

Joel Lovett, co-founder at High Tide, prefers to make a cold brew coffee with



Could taking CBD alongside coffee offset the negative effects of caffeine?

CBD using full-spectrum, organic, water-soluble THC-free CBD from the US.

To that effect

Like coffee, CBD is a highly individualised product. It comes from a plant that can be grown in many places, and extracted and used in many ways, and everyone will enjoy it and experience it differently. Dosage and effect all depend very much on the individual. Those who sell or use CBD unanimously say that it needs to be taken regularly – it isn’t something to try once if you want the effect, much like a dietary supplement or vitamin.

Control and consistency are crucial to CBD intake. Assembly’s James suggests taking it alongside your coffee might help you form a routine – but it would be a challenge for a café to fulfil this need for their customers. He says the ready-to-drink market may offer a more controlled and consistent way of experiencing coffee and CBD, an idea echoed by Joel at High

Tide. “We sell this as an energy drink rather than a way of supplementing with CBD. I would replace one dose with a bottle, but I wouldn’t drink more than one bottle a day.”

The world of CBD is a constantly shifting one, with legislation and consumer awareness developing constantly, and it’s a space where wellness and coffee could meet harmoniously. But most importantly, like the coffee world, it seems to be a space that is about individual exploration and finding what works for you. Do your research, understand the language and if it works for you then test, try, taste!



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