



J.P. Cisco saw first-hand the back pain suffered by his disabled uncle — and the relief he found from CBD oil derived from cannabis plants as an alternative to more addictive opioids and other pain relief medicines. So when Sanofi announced plans last year to cut some of the operations at Chattem where Cisco worked as a production manager, the 28-year-old Hixson native decided to try to start his own business in Tennessee's newly legalized industrial hemp market.

Cisco, who was trained in logistics and supply management at the University of Tennessee, has joined with his younger brother Joshua, a trained chemical engineer, from Tennessee Tech University and two others with experience in growing hemp in other states — Nik Shipley from Lookout Valley and Dominic Ratliff from Knoxville, to create a new Chattanooga business that will both grow hemp and process the plants.

The new venture, which the four founders have organized as Farmacy Fresh LLC, are branding their new product as Happy Hemp Farmacy. They are leasing two parcels to grow hemp near Chattanooga and are among more than 1,000 farmers in Tennessee who have been licensed by the state Department of Agriculture to grow the weed since the 2018 farm bill legalized growing hemp at the federal level for the first time.

"We are starting a family and friend-owned hemp company," Cisco says. "I've seen first-hand what this product can do for my family and friends for stress and anxiety relief and we want to build a company to grow and produce it here."

Hemp and marijuana are both in the Cannabis family, but the hemp planted by Farmacy Fresh in May is free of virtually all of the THC found in marijuana which gives its users their high.

The four founders, all in their 20s, each bring unique experience and expertise to the new business. Since banks are still reluctant to make any loans related to hemp or marijuana, the entrepreneurs have raised \$80,000 to get their venture started and the company began selling its first CBD oil tinctures in May. They hope to harvest their first plants this fall.