

OPINIONS

Growing marijuana: Past, present and future

BY REX GAROUTTE

As of July 1, 2015, recreational use of marijuana became legal in Oregon. We have joined Washington, Colorado, and Alaska in legalizing marijuana.

Just prior to July 1, there were several different petitions seeking signatures for banning the growing of either marijuana or hemp in the Applegate. All sides appeared to be very passionate about their position, but the discussions always seemed to become hyperbole instead of fact. I decided that the history and current laws that apply to the Applegate Valley regarding marijuana should be explored in order to decide how this legalization is going to impact us.

First, let's define some terms so we're all on the same page. Marijuana has two forms that we have to deal with. The first is hemp, also known as ditch weed. It is used for fiber, essential oil, and a source of protein. This form has less than one percent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is the compound that has a physical effect on your body. The second form occurs when only female plants are allowed to grow, and that is the drug form of marijuana, which, for the purpose of this article, shall be referred to as "weed."

Weed has been grown in the Applegate since the 1960s. Growers found that northern California and southern Oregon have ideal climates, public lands, and the water needed to grow weed. This fact was not lost on drug cartels, which utilized this area for large grows. Stumbling across grows has been a serious impediment to our access of public lands.

In 1998, Oregon passed Measure 67, which allowed for medical marijuana. In 2013, the legislature made medical marijuana dispensaries legal. Now the state has made recreational use legal, and we're looking at very uncertain times.

The biggest issue for marijuana is separating the growing areas of hemp and weed. The two forms currently can't be grown together. Weed is an unfertilized flower. The plant generates a resin on the flower to try to capture pollen. It's the resin that has the desired THC. Hemp

plants can ruin marijuana crops due to cross-pollination.

To give weed growers a head start, Representative Peter Buckley introduced HB 2668, which would have placed a moratorium on hemp growing in Jackson, Josephine, and Douglas Counties until 2020. This bill died in committee. Its failure will leave locations of grows up to the counties. Current thinking is that open air grows need two to five miles of separation between hemp and weed.

Let's look at the pitfalls of becoming a weed grower. After January 1, 2016, the Oregon Liquor Commission Control will start to issue growers' licenses. You will need land and water rights. The water requirements of weed and hemp make alfalfa look like cactus, so you'll need lots of water. Because weed is still illegal on a federal level, your property is at risk of confiscation. You will need to either hide the grow or create some heavy-duty security. Any security that includes armed guards or booby traps is not going to make you popular with your neighbors.

Another issue is what to do with the cash. Because the federal government considers the income to be coming from an illegal endeavor, the money cannot go into the banking system. The weed business in the US is estimated to be \$20 to \$40 billion. I expect some creative businesses to find a work-around for this issue.

What can we expect from the impending weed grows? Increase in paranoia? Yes. Higher level of animosity between growers and nongrowers? Probably. Public lands safe from illegal grows? No.

My fear is that people seeking big profits will change the fabric of our community. The flip side of the profiteers would be the vigilantes trying to destroy legal grows. We need to find our way to sustain the sense of community that keeps us here.

Rex Garoutte
rosellas@apbb.net

For more information on marijuana, visit www.socialphy.com/posts/news-politics/15625/16-Facts-About-Marijuana-And-The-Economy.html, www.nerdwallet.com/blog/cities/economics/how-much-money-states-make-marijuana-legalization/, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis_in_Oregon.

Cannabis: A farm industry in southern Oregon

BY ROB PENDELL

Last November, Oregon became the next state in this great country of ours to legalize cannabis for adult recreational use. What does this really mean?

As of July 1, persons 21 and over can use and possess a limited amount of cannabis in private without the risk of legal ramifications. How nice!

But is that all there is to it?

Based on the heated debates going on in practically every legislative body in the state, obviously not. Much of the debate revolves around whether cannabis should be grown and/or sold in counties and cities. The recently passed HB3400 gives municipalities the ability to ban cultivation and sales of cannabis in their area by putting the matter to a popular vote.

So, why all the debate?

If a municipality or concerned citizen doesn't want cannabis cultivation or sales in the community, they can gather signatures, put the issue on the ballot, and let the people vote. However, it seems some municipalities are arbitrarily attempting to ban or seriously curtail the presence of cannabis in their districts without so much as a "what do you think?"

Where's the democratic process in that?

It's understandable for those who have never used cannabis and have avoided it due to its illegality and nefarious reputation to be a little nervous. Cannabis has been vilified and labeled as a "gateway" drug for a long time. However, patient after patient has found relief from pain and dependency on other prescriptions by switching to cannabis. It seems to me to be more of a "destination" drug.

In an economy as depressed as southern Oregon's, a new industry can benefit everyone in the region. But cannabis really isn't a new industry. It has been thriving in southern Oregon for nearly 50 years. We just haven't heard much about it because, until 1998, it was totally illegal and the growers were very secretive about their business.

According to Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc., the three largest employers in the southern Oregon region are Asante with 4,231 employees, Harry and David with 2,000 employees, and Providence Hospital with 1,100 employees, for a total of 7,331 employees.

As a comparison, according to the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program,

there are currently 9,129 registered medical growers in southern Oregon. Most patients use a professional grower to grow cannabis for them, and a grower can serve four patients. If we assume that a quarter of the growers are personal patients growing their own cannabis, that leaves about 6,847 growers who are serving at least two patients or more. Growers serving multiple patients will hire anywhere from two to five people to help them. If we use the minimum number of two, that's 13,694 people employed in the cannabis industry, not counting the growers themselves! What's that number going to look like once it all becomes legal?

Washington and Colorado collected upwards of \$40 million in tax revenue in their first year of legal cannabis sales. It seems to be a no-brainer to me.

There is also a vibrant environmental discussion. Illegal growing operations are routinely found in public, pristine woodland areas. (Imagine if law enforcement had the resources to focus on that!) [Ed. Note: For information about environmental damage by illegal grows, see Jakob Shockey's article, "Poisoned marijuana grows are silencing our forests," in the winter 2013 *Applegater*.]

As a general rule, farmers are very careful about minimizing the environmental impact of their gardens by using organic and sustainable growing practices. Also as an agricultural crop, cannabis uses far less water than most other local crops.

Typical water usage for a cannabis garden with 48 plants is more than 1,500 gallons per week. My neighbor uses nearly 15,000 gallons a week to grow hay!

Personally I'm very excited about this new and dynamic time we're all living in and look forward to the collective sigh of relief that all growers will feel when this industry can operate in the open.

The Oregon Sungrown Growers' Guild is the largest cannabis advocacy group in the state and has been very active in the legislative process insuring that the rights of growers and patients are addressed. They are an excellent source of information and resources to anyone who is interested in or is already a part of this industry.

Visit www.oregonsungrown.org for more information.

Rob Pendell
Member, Oregon Sungrown
Growers' Guild
wingrider66@gmail.com



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Ron Turpen
541-601-1867
ron.turpen@gmail.com

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