

County Marijuana Industry Could Yield Tax Boon Calaveras Supervisors Study New State Medical Pot Regulations

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If Calaveras County voters were to approve a tax of \$9.25 per ounce on finished marijuana flowers, that tax would generate \$32 million a year in revenue for the county, according to the president of the Calaveras Cannabis Alliance.

Caslin Tomaszewski spoke Thursday morning before the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors during a special meeting held to study the package of marijuana regulations signed into law last week by California Gov. Jerry Brown.

Those laws create a statewide system to regulate medical marijuana cultivation, processing distribution and sales. And they also put pressure on county governments to adopt their own measures to regulate the industry. Growers, in particular, will not be able to obtain state licenses unless they first obtain a license from county authorities.

Tomaszewski said his organization supports the regulation of legal marijuana growers. He said he hopes Calaveras County will adopt a comprehensive zoning ordinance to regulate the local industry and will use revenues from taxes and fees on marijuana to crack down on competitors who operate outside the law.

“They destroy public lands. They disregard the wellbeing of their neighbors in pursuit of personal gain,” Tomaszewski said of the illicit growers.

Paul Smith, a lobbyist for the Rural County Representatives of California, explained the effects of the new laws to the board of supervisors. Calaveras County is one of 34 rural counties that make up the organization.

Smith said that RCRC does not oppose or support marijuana, but seeks to protect the interests of member counties. To that end, the group and others lobbied effectively to make sure that the new marijuana regulation laws protect the rights of local jurisdictions to control local land use, including the right to ban marijuana cultivation if they choose. The new law also protects the rights of counties to tax marijuana, although any new taxes would still have to win voter approval, Smith said.

The county board of supervisors earlier this year rejected an opportunity to pass a zoning ordinance that would have regulated where and how marijuana can be grown here, including such questions as the odor impacts endured by neighbors.

In recent months, however, county officials have privately acknowledged that they are again preparing to consider some kind of local regulation.

Tomaszewski and two other members of the Calaveras Cannabis Alliance board of directors were on hand to remind county supervisors of the industry's economic importance here.

"This county is still reeling from the Butte Fire," said Mark Bolger, one of the Calaveras Cannabis Alliance board members. "I think it is a no brainer. We can harness the potential of the industry. I think it goes without saying it is the most valuable commodity in the county."

If Tomaszewski's estimate of production is correct, then the county currently produces about 216,000 pounds of marijuana per year, or more than 100 tons. Competition has been driving down prices in the last few years, but even at \$500 a pound, that crop would be worth \$108 million a year. Some strains of marijuana sell for \$1,000 a pound or more.

Still, at least some county residents don't want the industry here.

"The one sure fire way to get out of this is to just ban it," said Bill McManus, who regularly addresses the board of supervisors on marijuana-related matters.

Jed Richardson, the owner of Cave City Vineyards and also a member of the Calaveras Cannabis Alliance Board, said he thinks the county needs to rebuild its economic base. "The cannabis industry needs to do their part to support the county with taxation and fees," he said.

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