
North Coast cannabis producers react to California's draft medical marijuana rules

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The first draft of rules for California's medical marijuana industry would establish a highly regulated business environment, with strict limits on the hours of operation and the amount of THC infused into oils, and in turn set standards for cleaner, more consistent products for pot consumers.

State regulators from three departments released a trove of proposed rules Friday for marijuana cultivation, processing, distribution and sales in a highly anticipated step for those poised to take part in the state's first attempt at taking charge of what's been, for two decades, an unregulated medical cannabis sector. The public has 45 days to give input.

North Coast cannabis industry players said they are preparing to push the state to fine-tune the rules, which do not address recreational marijuana. The detailed regulations will undergo a series of revisions and are set to take effect in 2018.

"Honestly our feedback is so positive at this point," said Hezekiah Allen, executive director of the California Growers Association. "We do have a long list of technical concerns — what does this mean? how does that work? — but the bottom line is they are a very quality set of regulations."

The cost of doing business will rise with greater requirements for security, delivery, testing and other aspects of the business. A financial analysis done for the state

estimated the total increase in costs at \$524 per pound. Marijuana sells wholesale for between \$800 and \$2,500 per pound, depending on a variety of factors like growing methods and processing.

Individual plants would be tracked from seeds and flowers to processing facilities. Dispensaries wouldn't be able to package products or give out free samples, but they would be able to deliver products following certain rules covering everything from the volume of deliveries to types of delivery vehicles.

Mara Gordon, founder of Aunt Zelda's, a manufacturer of three cannabis-based medical oils based in Bodega Bay, said the state is setting out to drastically limit the amount of THC in products aimed to treat health conditions, which "shows a lack of understanding of a medical patient's need."

Amounts of THC, the main psychoactive compound in marijuana, would be limited to 10 milligrams per serving and 100 milligrams per package. Gordon said those amounts are appropriate for recreational cannabis products but create an unfair burden for people treating serious health conditions.

A patient with cancer or epilepsy could easily take 200 milligrams of THC per day, which under the proposed rules would require consuming greater volumes of oils or foods, Gordon said.

"Our products, we call them bio-pharmaceutical products and we think of them as serious medicines for serious diseases," Gordon said. "It's all getting lumped together with the self-medicating person who is using a gummy bear."

The state is pushing to greatly restrict the types of foods with cannabis, and would ban the infusion of marijuana with alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, dairy and juice. It would also ban perishable or canned cannabis-infused products.

The rules appear aimed at limiting the industry's ability to create products that might

appeal to children. Additionally, the state issued guidelines for packaging to be opaque, contain a state-designated THC warning symbol and avoid any cartoonish design.

Santa Rosa manufacturer and distributor CannaCraft would be forced to pull a line of cannabis-infused chocolates called Satori. The line includes some milk chocolate products, which use powdered milk, and a chocolate-covered coffee bean using Sebastopol-based Taylor Maid Farms products.

Company spokesman Nick Caston said they will push the state to explain any scientific or health reasons for prohibiting certain types of cannabis-infused products.

"What is the governmental business in preventing those things from being in the same product?" Caston said.

Santa Rosa cannabis-attorney Omar Figueroa said he's concerned about rules aimed at curbing entrepreneurship in the industry. Figueroa said he's working with several Sonoma County vintners interested in creating cannabis-infused wines.

"Nobody thought that would be part of it," Figueroa said.

A proposed bill set for a legislative vote in June could supersede the current rules effort. Known as a "trailer bill," it would redirect the state to create a unified system for regulating both recreational and medical cannabis industries.

Allen, with the California Growers Association, said his group will push to keep the medical marijuana rules intact and separate because they contain strong protections for small-scale farmers — such as tiered fee structures based on operation size — going up against big production operations.

He said his trade group's policy team will spend weeks going over the rules and writing detailed responses he expects will "be as substantive as the proposed rules."

“These proposed rules are probably the best possible outcome for cottage and artisanal growers,” Allen said. “The problem would be if this were revoked and replaced with a less protective framework.”

The proposed regulations can be found [here](#).

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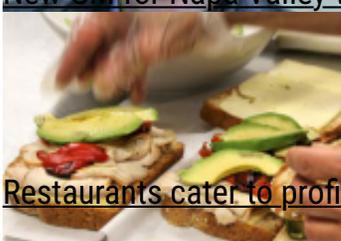
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