

# OSU expert says farmers would swamp pot market

Growers already produce more than state consumes

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

Pot quality would suffer and Oregon’s conventional farmers would swamp the market if they turned their skill, equipment, land and infrastructure to marijuana production, an Oregon State University expert says.

Seth Crawford, who teaches a pot policy class at OSU, said Oregon already produces far more high-quality cannabis than the state consumes, and could meet the state demand on 35 acres of farmland in Southern Oregon.

Crawford said Oregon’s growers could supply the total U.S. cannabis market on just 5,000 acres.

“Throw in another 500 and you’d cover Canada, too,” Crawford said.

He said Oregon now grows the best pot in the country at reasonable prices, and quality would decline if large growers jumped into the business. Existing growers have refined their techniques over 20, 30 or 40 years, in some cases, he said.

“There’s a difference between large-scale agricultural producers and these marijuana producers,” he said. “They’re still small scale compared to a 10,000-acre wheat ranch. The way the Oregon market evolved was thousands of



Courtesy of Oregon State University  
Seth Crawford, who teaches a pot policy class at OSU, says cannabis is Oregon’s most valuable crop and is widely exported.

small growers producing high quality products and unique products. You couldn’t do it on an industrial scale.”

There don’t appear to be any conventional farmers clamoring to jump into the market. And for now, seeding the back 40 with sativa isn’t legal.

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission, which will regulate wholesale commercial production under Measure 91, has yet to draft specific rules.

The law, which was approved by voters in the November 2014 election and takes effect July 1, allows individuals to possess up to eight ounces of pot and grow up to four plants per household for personal use.

As pot prohibition laws begin to recede nationally, however, the prospect of bigger markets and industrial-sized grow operations occasionally comes up in casual, just-won-



Pamplin Media Group

An OSU pot policy expert says conventional farmers would swamp the market if they got into large-scale commercial marijuana production. Existing growers, he says, already produce more than is consumed in Oregon.

dering type of conversations, some producers say. What if Oregon’s grass seed growers decided to grow the other kind of grass? What if the state’s nursery operators turned their greenhouse expertise to marijuana production?

Crawford said they shouldn’t bother, because supply already outstrips demand.

Crawford said cannabis — unofficially — is Oregon’s most valuable crop, with an estimated annual value approaching \$1 billion. Based on his surveys of legal and illegal growers, the state’s “internal marijuana demand” in 2014 was about 150,628 pounds. At \$150 an ounce, that’s \$361 million.

Medical marijuana growers grew and exported

391,694 pounds above the Oregon demand, worth \$587 million, Crawford said. That makes the farm gate value of Oregon’s pot exports alone greater than the combined value of hazelnuts, pears, wine grapes, Christmas trees and blueberries, according to Crawford’s estimates.

Crawford said his figures are based on self-reported data from growers he reached through a “chain referral” survey technique, in which the first respondents invite others in their social network to take part, and the sample size grows in a snowball fashion. Still, the underground nature of the industry makes it difficult to get precise information, Crawford acknowledged.

Bruce Pokarney, spokesman for the Oregon Depart-

## Oregon State’s Master Gardeners won’t offer pot growing advice

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

The Master Gardeners program offered through Oregon State University Extension is well-regarded for the advice, workshops, garden tours and demonstrations its volunteers provide to people learning how to grow and care for plants.

But don’t expect Master Gardeners to provide marijuana tips when Measure 91 takes effect July 1 and Oregonians are allowed to grow up to four plants per household.

A policy adopted by OSU notes that the university receives federal funding, and the feds still

classify cannabis as illegal. The university and its extension programs are governed by the federal Controlled Substance Act, the Drug Free Workplace Act and the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act.

To avoid the risk of losing federal funding, the policy states, “OSU Extension, staff and volunteers do not provide advice or referrals on the culture, care and/or use of marijuana.”

Because marijuana remains a federally controlled substance, OSU is not planning any courses on marijuana propagation, cultivation or production, the university said.

ment of Agriculture, said the department has no way to assess the state’s cannabis crop value. “But, assuming the OSU numbers are correct, marijuana would likely be at the top of the list of commodities in terms of production value,” he said in an email.

The department assists other commodity groups with research, marketing and regulations, but is in a holding pattern as the Legislature decides how to implement

Measure 91, Pokarney said. “Once the Legislature provides direction, we will have a better idea of how we will be involved in supporting the industry.”

Crawford teaches a sociology class titled, “Marijuana Policy in the 21st Century.” Students were asked to produce a collectively-authored paper with their recommendations for how marijuana should be grown, sold and distributed in Oregon.

# Slugs remain a mystery, experts say

More research needed on how to thwart the pests

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Despite their close familiarity with the slimy pests, farmers in Oregon’s Willamette Valley continue to be baffled by slugs.

Growers and researchers recently puzzled over the mollusk’s onslaught against numerous crops during Oregon State University’s “Slug Summit,” held March 25 in Salem.

Slugs have grown as a problem in recent decades but it’s debatable why they’re causing more damage, farmers and scientists from OSU and USDA agreed.

Effectively thwarting the pest also remains a mystery.

The decline of field burning and rise of no-till and reduced tillage farming are sometimes blamed for increased slug numbers, creating better opportunities for the pest to find safe harbor.

However, some farmers reported persistent slug problems despite tilling heavily and burning fields.

Other theories for the pest’s rise include climate change and the lower prevalence of toxic pesticides,



Courtesy of Robin Rosetta, OSU  
European red slugs are quite common in gardens and landscapes.

but the lack of a clear culprit is one reason that more slug research is needed, according to summit participants.

In some years, a crop will be devastated by slugs despite the use of poison bait, but the same field will respond positively to treatment in other years, several growers said.

Metalddehyde, a chemical commonly used to dessicate slugs, doesn’t always kill them, said George Hoffman, an OSU faculty research associate.

Those surviving mollusks are quick to develop an aversion to the slug bait, which varies in effectiveness depending on weather and crop conditions, he said.

For example, it’s less ef-

fective during low temperatures and harder for slugs to find in structurally “complex” mature field crops compared to those that have recently germinated, Hoffman said.

Young slugs also avoid metalddehyde granules in favor of fungi and other food sources, so the chemical can be taken up by earthworms rather than the target pest, experts said.

It’s unlikely that more toxic pesticides for slugs will come onto the market because of harmful collateral consequences for other species, said Paul Jepson, director of OSU’s Integrated Plant Protection Center.

Disrupting the pest’s reproduction with pheromones or releasing natural predators are viable options, but these measures must be employed in concert to be effective, he said.

“There are plenty of things that eat slugs and really love them, but the problem is they’re not suf-

ficient,” Jepson said.

Summit participants broached several other possible control methods, including nematodes and diseases that affect slugs.

Shutting off genes that are crucial to the slug’s life cycle with mollusk-specific “RNAi” pesticides was also discussed.

For chemical manufacturers to focus on the problem, they’d have to foresee a profitable return on investment for a mollusk-specific pesticide, said Sujaya Rao, an OSU field entomologist.

Such a chemical would also have to work and be registered for a broad variety of crops, which poses a challenge, she said.

Dan Arp, dean of OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences, said the university recognizes that slug research is a priority for farmers in the region.

The university is seeking increased state funding for extension agents who could deal with the issue, he said. However, current proposals by key Oregon lawmakers would only raise funding for extension services enough to keep up with inflation, Arp said.

Regardless of potential funding increases, new positions may be created as existing OSU faculty members retire, he said. The university may also designate a “strike team” of existing professors and agents to help study and control slugs.

“We need this coordinated effort, it has to be done that way,” Arp said.

# State health agency rewriting farmworker housing standards

New rules could exceed federal requirements

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Growers who provide housing for seasonal workers face additional costs to meet new standards proposed by the Washington Department of Health, farm groups and producers say.

The department is expected to soon revise regulations for temporary farmworker housing. The rules will dictate everything from minimum living space to temperature settings for hot water tanks and refrigerators.

Health officials say the new rules, meant to protect workers, haven’t been finalized and won’t be in effect for this growing season.

But the department has released proposed rules that are drawing complaints from farm groups.

In some ways, the proposed rules exceed federal standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Growers have spent anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per bed to satisfy federal rules and qualify to hire foreign workers on H-2A visas, Washington Farm Labor Association H-2A program manager Roxanna Macias said.

Housing built under those standards should be exempt from the new rules, she said. “There needs to be a grandfather clause. If not, we’re going to lose a lot of beds and ultimately that’s going to impact our agricultural members and the industry as a whole.”

The health department in 2014 licensed 266 tem-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Okanogan County Farm Bureau President Jon Wyss looks at handouts on farmworker housing March 26 after a Senate work session in Olympia on rules proposed by the Washington Department of Health.

porary farmworker residences, with 16,633 beds.

The department’s director of health facilities, Lisa Hodgson, said the agency based its proposed rules on meetings with agricultural groups and worker advocates. “Some of the areas we exceeded (federal standards), we heard from the advocates that they want additional standards put into place to protect the workers,” she said.

As proposed, the new rules would require growers to provide more toilets than mandated by OSHA.

The rules also would impose new requirements for locks on bathroom doors, partitions between kitchens and sleeping areas, fire extinguishers, rails on bunk beds, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

A lawyer who represents farmworkers, Dan Ford of Columbia Legal Services, said the proposed rules don’t go far enough in some cases.

There should be at least one shower per six workers, not the proposed 10 workers, and housing should be cooled to at least 80 degrees, not the proposed 90 degrees, he said.

The health department proposes to adopt the federal standard of 100 square feet of living space per worker. Ford said that’s too tight for physical and mental health. “Even the OSHA standards are not humane,” he said.



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