

# Marijuana testing poses regulatory quandaries

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

WILSONVILLE, Ore. — Marijuana testing is creating several quandaries for Oregon regulators at a time of overall uncertainty for the newly legalized crop, according to a state official.

Testing for pesticides poses one challenge, as the necessary instrumentation is expensive and complicated, said Jeff Rhoades, senior adviser on marijuana policy for Gov. Kate Brown.

While state regulators want to protect public health, testing is a large barrier to entry into the legal recreational marijuana market, he said during the

Oregon Board of Agriculture meeting in Wilsonville, Ore., on Nov. 30.

An overly strict testing regime would be a disadvantage to small growers while favoring large out-of-state companies, Rhoades said.

"It's a very delicate balance with testing here," he said.

One pesticide that's commonly used on grapes, for example, breaks down into hydrogen cyanide when set aflame, he said.

Meanwhile, marijuana is sold not just as a flower, but also in the form of various tinctures and extracts that require specific testing methods, Rhoades said.

"It can't be just a one-size-fits-all approach," he said.

There are also no federally approved pesticides that are specific to the psychoactive crop, Rhoades said.

Currently, Oregon has 18 laboratories accredited to test marijuana, but just four are able to test for pesticides.

Other marijuana traits that are tested for include microbial contamination, solvents and potency.

Potency testing has also encountered problems since it became mandatory on Oct. 1, said Rhoades.

Marijuana growers were receiving greatly variable results from different labs, and were

flocking to those providing the highest potency ratings, he said.

"Lab shopping was happening all over the place," he said.

Regulators are now trying to create a standardized testing protocol for potency so growers can expect uniform results, Rhoades said.

Taxes from marijuana sales in Oregon are expected to be a boon to state coffers, but first the Oregon Liquor Control Commission must be repaid for its extensive work in creating a regulatory system for the crop, he said.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has also been

heavily involved in regulations involving pesticides, food safety and accurate scale systems, Rhoades said.

Exactly how the agency will be repaid for these efforts is currently unclear, though the issue is being discussed and will likely surface during the 2017 legislative session, he said.

Marijuana remains illegal under federal law, which has made banks leery of dealing with marijuana companies — a complication that raises additional issues, Rhoades said.

"It's an all-cash business at this point, which creates public safety concerns and tax collection concerns," he said.

Regulators in Oregon and

the seven other states where recreational marijuana is now legal were hoping for clarity from the federal government that would enable more banking involvement, he said.

With the recent election and upcoming change in presidential administrations, however, there's great uncertainty about federal marijuana policy, Rhoades said.

The Obama administration's approach — which allows recreational marijuana as long as it's kept out of the black market and away from children, among other measures — can be immediately reversed by the Trump administration, he said.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press  
Chris and Kandi Bartels, who own the Bartels Farms beef company, are re-opening their cattle processing facility after a USDA-ordered suspension and self-initiated equipment upgrade.

## Beef company recovers from rough patch

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — An Oregon beef processing facility is re-opening after a rough patch that included an operating suspension ordered by the USDA and an expensive equipment upgrade.

Bartels Farms, an organic and grass-fed beef company based in Eugene, Ore., planned to restart its slaughter facility in late November after shutting down for several weeks.

The interruption in operations has cost the company roughly \$8 million to \$10 million in lost revenues, as it has been unable to process about 11,000 head of cattle, said Chris Bartels, the firm's president.

The shutdown also created problems for livestock producers who expected to sell cattle to Bartels Farms, as well as retailers who couldn't get their orders for meat filled, he said.

"The ripple effect is tremendous," he said.

Despite some negative attention in the local media, retail buyers have stuck by the company after the suspension, said his wife, Kandi Bartels.

"If we had lost our customers, it would have been a different story," she said.

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service began enforcement action against Bartels Farms in September after several incidents in which cattle weren't immediately rendered unconscious from a stun with a captive-bolt gun, requiring a repeated stun, according to agency documents.

The agency suspended inspections at the facility — ef-

fectively stopping operations — in mid-October, citing "continued failures to maintain and implement humane handling controls" after finding a cow had become trapped in a head restraint.

Bartels Farms appealed that decision, arguing the cow simply pulled back against the head restraint, which was not a violation.

The USDA ultimately rescinded its suspension in early November after finding the "events described did not rise to the level of a non-compliance per the regulations," but the facility remained closed for improvements.

Chris Bartels said the suspension resulted from an inexperienced USDA veterinarian misinterpreting regulations, but he nonetheless decided to invest \$150,000 for upgrades to the facility to ensure humane handling.

The company installed a serpentine "drive alley" leading cattle to the facility that avoids sharp corners and thus reduces stress on the cows, he said.

The alley was also covered in panels to prevent contact with humans and distresses to livestock. A new restrainer was installed to prevent cattle from moving their heads prior to stunning, rather than simply holding their necks, he said.

The system was based on designs from Temple Grandin, a well-known animal scientist at Colorado State University who specializes in humane handling, and were inspected by a former USDA veterinarian, Bartels said.

The improvements to the facility's "knock box" are aimed at preventing future mis-stuns, he said.

## Portland hosts national Women in Sustainable Agriculture conference

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — A national conference of Women in Sustainable Agriculture wasn't the place to go looking for traditional farm wives. Try farm operators, owners and ag researchers, brokers, marketers and educators instead.

The conference, held Nov. 30-Dec. 2 in Portland, attracted 400 women from across the country, and two dozen speakers and panelists. The event, held this year for the first time on the West Coast, provided extensive networking and education opportunities, said Maud Powell, a small farms specialist with Oregon State University Extension in Jackson and Josephine counties.

"Women are increasingly important in agriculture across the country," Powell said. Once marginalized as farm wives, she said, women can now be found in every agricultural sector.

Oregon saw the early formation of two women farmers networks, one in Southern Oregon and one in the Willamette Valley, Powell said. Similar organizations developed in Iowa, Pennsylvania, Vermont and elsewhere, and the national organization of Women in Sustainable Agriculture grew from there.

Within the organization, "sustainable" means farm operations that support long-term success in economic, environmental and social aspects, Powell said. That includes supporting the local community and local businesses, she said.

"For me it's always fascinating to see how the issues of sustainable agriculture are similar, with local flavor," she said.

The conference began with tours of farms in the Columbia River Gorge, Willamette Valley and the Portland area. Other events included a "Trailblazers Panel" in which three women who assumed leading roles in ag early on described their experiences.

Among the scheduled panel speakers was Jeanne Carver, who with her husband, Dan, operates the historic Imperial Stock Ranch in North Central Oregon. Wool produced by the



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press  
Oregon State University small farms specialists Melissa Fery, left, and Maud Powell check in people registering for the Women in Sustainable Agriculture conference in Portland.

ranch took the spotlight when the Ralph Lauren clothing line found them while looking for American yarn with which to make USA uniforms for the opening ceremonies of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia.

Other speakers were to be Diane Green of Greentree Naturals, a small acreage and CSA farm near Sandpoint, Idaho; and Joan Thorndike of Le Mera Gardens, a fresh-cut flowers operation in Southern Oregon's Rogue River Valley.

Thirty percent of U.S. farmers are women, according to the USDA's 2012 Census of Agriculture, but the number has been in flux. The census counted 969,672 women farmers in 2012, a 2 percent

decrease from 2007. The reason for that is unclear, but some in ag speculate that the deep recession that hit in 2009 forced some new farmers out of the profession.

Women made up 14 per-

cent of principal operators in the 2012 census, but they tend to be older than principal operators overall. Only 4 percent of women principal operators were under 35, according to census.

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