

TAKING ROOT

Marijuana growers consider themselves farmers, even if their 'fields' are warehouses and their crops are still against federal law



By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

SALEM — Danny Grimm shares many of the concerns familiar to producers throughout the Pacific Northwest and Northern California. Start with federal regulatory overreach, because the recent, undefined rumblings out of the Trump administration about “greater enforcement” are enough to give anyone pause.

Throw in questions about water quality and nutrient inputs, plus a complicated infrastructure of pumps, water lines and electrical controls that Grimm and his employees must maintain. And don't forget pests. Like many producers he'd rather not use chemical insecticides, and so far he's protecting his crop with battalions of predator mites, ladybugs and beneficial nematodes.

“Once you're having problems, if you don't know how to fix it, bugs will eat you alive,” Grimm said.

The biggest issue is market uncertainty. Farmers are always looking for the next big thing, and a lot of people are jumping in to meet the demand. But what looks like a gold rush now could go south if over-supply drops the price.

Grimm said scaling up production will be the biggest challenge for small producers.

“It goes like any other industry,” he said. “There will be people who fail and people who make it — people who are able to scale up and keep the quality.”

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Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Uplifted Farm owner Danny Grimm won a pair of blue ribbons at the Oregon State Fair for the cannabis he grows in a Salem industrial area. The state's growers consider themselves farmers and a new sector of agriculture, and the state agrees.

Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Vendor Jenny Argie, left, of Brooklyn, rubs pain relieving medical cannabis lotion on Brian Bergmann's hand during the recent Cannabis Collaborative Conference in Portland. The lotion is infused with non-psychoactive CBD oil, or cannabidiol, extracted from pot plants.



Washington commission confirms What's Upstream stayed within state law

Specific policy, but no specific bill

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington Public Commission ruled Feb. 23 that What's Upstream organizers did not engage in unreported lobbying of state lawmakers, clearing

the advocacy campaign funded by the Environmental Protection Agency of one allegation of wrongdoing.

The three-member citizens panel adopted the staff's conclusion that the push to ban farming within 100 feet of water fell short of lobbying. The commission voted to take no enforcement action, a recommendation that will go to the state attorney general's office for review.

PDC Executive Director Evelyn Fielding Lopez said “reasonable minds” could differ on the finding, especially since What's Upstream provided supporters with form letters encouraging lawmakers to impose mandatory buffers.

A PDC investigator said he couldn't determine whether a website link to the letter



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Washington Public Disclosure Commission Executive Director Evelyn Fielding Lopez talks to the commission at a meeting Feb. 23 in Olympia.

alone cost more than \$1,400, the threshold for triggering reporting requirements.

A bigger point for the PDC staff was that the letter and other elements of the campaign didn't mention a specific bill.

Lopez said there wasn't an “actual nugget of legislation” advocated by What's

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ICE arrests of criminal illegal immigrants spark concerns

If agents show up, they need a warrant, farm employers told

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Several agricultural employers, while understanding of the Trump administration's arrests of criminal illegal immigrants, said at a labor conference that it's causing apprehension among workers.

Conference organizers also shared tips on what owners and managers should do if Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrive at a farm or other workplace.

Paula McKay, manag-



Dan Fazio



Paula McKay



Darrin Kenoyer

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er and principal owner of Mar-Jon Labor, a large labor contractor in Othello, Wash., said workers are worried because of what they see on television. She said employers are not overly worried because it's nothing new and that ICE arrests of criminal illegal immigrants have been going on a long time under previous administrations.

“What's new is the media is making a big deal of it and

Trump is more blunt,” said McKay, who is Hispanic.

She was among a couple hundred employers at the annual labor conference of WAFLA, formerly the Washington Farm Labor Association, at the Yakima Convention Center on Feb. 23.

“I don't have a problem rounding up criminals, and most people don't,” she said.

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