

People & Places

Navigating cannabis policy's complexities

Sunny Jones helps Oregon producers comply with state's new regulations

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

There's no shortage of confusion over Oregon's cannabis rules.

Establishing a regulatory regime for the crop has been compared to building an airplane while it's in mid-flight, said Sunny Jones, cannabis policy coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

"When you're trying to start an industry from the ground up, there are going to be some learning curves and bumps in the road," she said.

Jones is charged with helping cannabis producers navigate the byzantine regulatory system they must traverse to legally grow the crop.

Consider the complex layers of its legal status.

Varieties of the plant with minuscule levels of THC, a psychoactive substance, can be grown for research purposes as hemp under federal law, but cultivars with higher levels of THC, which are considered marijuana, remain federally prohibited.

Nonetheless, Oregon has legalized marijuana for medical and recreational purposes, with both uses regulated differently under state law.

Several state agencies are involved in overseeing marijuana's cultivation and sale, including the Liquor Control Commission, the Health Authority and the Department of Agriculture.

Regulating pesticides used on marijuana is within ODA's jurisdiction, as is the food safety enforcement of edible marijuana products and the testing of scales used for weighing the crop.

Meanwhile, the state's licensing system for industrial hemp is also administered by ODA.

Managing change

If all this wasn't complicated enough, Oregon lawmakers are also continually revising the state's cannabis laws as the industry finds its legs.

"We're only a few years



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Sunny Jones, the cannabis policy coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, helps growers navigate the complex regulatory system for marijuana and hemp.

in. It's going to continue to change," said Jones, who began working as the agency's cannabis policy coordinator in 2015, a year after Oregon voters legalized recreational marijuana.

Some aspects of the cannabis industry have evolved in unexpected ways.

When Oregon lawmakers legalized industrial hemp, they expected the crop would be primarily cultivated for oilseed and fiber.

Instead, most Oregon hemp growers are focused on cultivating hemp flowers, which produce cannabidiol, a non-psychoactive substance thought to possess healthful qualities.

At this point, Oregon hemp farmers lack nearby processing facilities for fiber and oilseed, Jones said. "We

don't have a lot of infrastructure for other uses."

The production of cannabidiol extract from hemp is also becoming intermixed with the marijuana industry, as cannabis entrepreneurs are seeking to create novel products by combining the substance with THC extract.

Such developments require Oregon lawmakers and regulators to clarify how these interactions are regulated, Jones said.

Jones often fields questions about pesticides and cannabis, which is a tricky subject because the crop is illegal under federal law.

Because no pesticides are specifically labeled for cannabis, growers can only use products that aren't subject to federal residue tolerance rules. The pesticides

must also be labeled for use on a broad assortment of plants, as opposed to distinct crops.

Advice lacking

The federal illegality of cannabis imposes a problem for growers seeking agronomic advice, since Oregon State University's Extension system is prohibited from advising on the crop.

"Not having extension services is hard," Jones said. "Who do you look to for the best practices?"

The solution may be found in cannabis farmers working together.

Jones believes it may be wise to form commodity commissions for hemp or marijuana, which would allow growers to pool resources and steer research.



**Western
Innovator**

Sunny Jones

Occupation: Cannabis policy coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture

Age: 36

Education: Bachelor of science in bioresource research, Oregon State University in 2003

Hometown: Salem, Ore.

Family: A partner and two children

The cannabis community isn't limited to the "Birkenstock, tie-dye crowd," and includes engineers and others from diverse backgrounds, she said.

"It's really cool the wide group of people I get to work with on a regular basis," Jones said. "Community is a core value for me as a person, and I get to put that value into action in this position."

Community interactions have played a significant role in Jones' career since she graduated from OSU in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in bioresource research.

She initially advised people on pesticides at the National Pesticide Information Center, then was hired by ODA to run its pesticide use reporting system.

The system never worked well because of the disparity between needed information and farmers' privacy interests — the data was too general to be useful while growers chafed at reporting requirements.

When the program was eventually scrapped, Jones remained at ODA as a pesticide investigator before taking the cannabis policy coordinator job.

Though the pesticide use reporting system wasn't successful, the experience has proven valuable in her new role.

"I'm used to jumping into a position that hasn't existed before," Jones said.

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Calendar

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Thursday, Jan. 4

Ag Tech Boot Camp. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Roy F. Christensen Building, Idaho State University campus, Pocatello, Idaho. Presenters will feature the latest innovations in crop and livestock production. Sponsored by University of Idaho Extension officials, private industry representatives and state commodity group leaders. Cost: \$30

Friday, Jan. 5

Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop. 10 a.m.-noon. How to prune apple trees in the tall spindle system and how to prune peach trees. Details about location will be provided to those who RSVP. Jeff Choate at jeff.choate@oregonstate.edu or 541-344-1709. Cost: Free

Friday-Wednesday

Jan. 5-10

2018 American Farm Bureau Federation Convention and IDEAG Trade Show. Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, 2800 Opryland Drive, Nashville, Tenn. Celebrate the accomplishments of leaders in agriculture and witness powerful keynote speakers in the general sessions. Explore the IDEAG Trade Show floor to gain a stronger industry network, shop featured products, learn about innovative technologies, and enjoy TED-style talks on the Cultivation Center stage. Website: http://bit.ly/2iJ59t3

Tuesday-Wednesday

Jan. 9-10

Cropping Systems Conference. 7:30 a.m. Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W Grandridge Blvd.,

Kennewick, Wash. The Conference is sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, but it's not just for direct seeders. Besides a robust selection of presentations, it also offers six educational tracks and a trade show. Website: www.directseed.org/events/annual-conference

Tuesday-Thursday

Jan. 9-11

N. Willamette Horticulture Society Conference and Trade Show. 8 a.m.-4:15 p.m. Clackamas County Event Center, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. This year's conference will include a vegetable crops section on Jan. 9, an organic section on Jan. 10 and a berry section on Jan. 11. Website: http://nwhortsoc.com

Wednesday, Jan. 10

Developing or Expanding Your Farm Stand or Agritourism Operation, Part 3. 5-8 p.m. OSU Extension, Auditorium, SOREC, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Are you interested in developing or expanding a farm stand or agritourism operation? Jan. 10 is Accepting Food Stamps/SNAP/EBT at a Farm Stand or CSA and Feb. 6 is Starting a Farm Stand/Agritourism Operation. Website: http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms

Wednesday-Friday

Jan. 10-12

Potato Expo 2018, 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Rosen Shingle Creek, 9939 Universal Blvd., Orlando, Florida. Over the last 10 years, the Potato Expo has gained the reputation as the best setting for conducting business and getting caught up on industry issues. Talk about new equipment, products, technology and innovations in the potato industry. Website: potato-expo.com

Thursday-Friday

Jan. 11-12

Oregon Essential Oil Growers League Annual Conference. Salishan Lodge, 7760 US-101, Gleneden Beach, Ore. This is the annual conference of the Oregon mint industry.

Website: oregonmint.org

Monday, Jan. 15

Sheep Producer Workshop. Etchamendy Sheep Company, 24394 Highway 46, Wasco, Calif. The California Wool Growers Association is hosting four interactive workshops focusing on improving lamb marketing and quality as well as producer profitability by applying innovative management practices and technologies. To register contact the CWGA office at info@woolgrowers.org or (916) 444-8122.

Tuesday, Jan. 16

Sheep Producer Workshop. Emigh Livestock, 2838 Goose Haven Road, Suisun City, Calif. California Wool Growers Association is hosting four interactive workshops focusing on improving lamb marketing and quality as well as producer profitability by applying innovative management practices and technologies. To register contact the CWGA office at info@woolgrowers.org or (916) 444-8122.

Soil Health Workshop with Brendon Rockey & Steve Kenyon. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. The Gathering Place, 510 South Main, Three Forks, Mont. We have a number of great presenters lined up throughout the week that will share their own experiences in building and maintaining soil health. Cost: \$20. Website: http://bit.ly/2zGUuZC

Wednesday, Jan. 17

Sheep Producer Workshop. Chico State University Sheep Unit, 311 Nicholas C Shouten Lane, Chico, Calif. The California Wool Growers Association is hosting four interactive workshops focusing on improving lamb marketing and quality as well as producer profitability. To register contact the CWGA office at info@woolgrowers.org or (916) 444-8122.

Soil Health Workshop Featuring Brendon Rockey & Wendy Taheri. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Holiday Inn, 1100 5th St. S, Great Falls, Mont. Cost: \$20.

Website: http://bit.ly/2BpZyNT

Wednesday-Thursday

Jan. 17-18

Idaho Noxious Weed Conference. Riversider Hotel, 2900 W. Chinden Blvd. Boise, Idaho. A variety of presenters will offer information important to weed control. Website: www.idahoweedcontrol.org

Thursday, Jan. 18

Sheep Producer Workshop. UC Hopland Research and Extension Center, 4070 University Road, Hopland, Calif. To register contact the CWGA office at info@woolgrowers.org or (916) 444-8122.

Soil Health Workshop Featuring Brendon Rockey & Steve Kenyon. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Big Horn Resort, 1801 Majestic Lane, Billings, Mont. We have a number of great presenters lined up throughout the week that will share their own experiences in building and maintaining soil health. Cost: \$20. Website: http://bit.ly/2zGUuZC

Friday, Jan. 19

SAIF Agri-Business Banquet. 6-9 p.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. The SAIF Agri-Business Banquet is a celebration of the agricultural community and its impact on the mid-Willamette Valley. The Salem Area Chamber of Commerce prioritizes hosting this event along with title sponsor SAIF and presenting sponsor KeyBank because agriculture is a key part of Oregon's economy. The banquet will feature guest speaker Steve Gilliland's humor, inspiration and business insight. There will also be recognition of an outstanding FFA student for leadership in shaping the future of the agricultural industry. Website: https://salemchamber.org/

Soil Health Workshop Featuring Brendon Rockey & Derek Axton. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Richland County Fairgrounds, 2118 W Holly St. Sidney, Mont. We have a number of great

presenters lined up throughout the week that will share their own experiences in building and maintaining soil health. Cost: \$20. Website: http://bit.ly/2zGUuZC

Soil Health Workshop Featuring Steve Kenyon & Wendy Taheri. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Sleep Inn, 1006 S. Haynes Ave., Miles City, Mont. We have a number of great presenters lined up throughout the week that will share their own experiences in building and maintaining soil health. Cost: \$20. Website: http://bit.ly/2zGUuZC

Family Foresters Workshop. 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Coeur d'Alene Inn, 506 W Appleway Ave., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The workshop, sponsored by the University of Idaho and Washington State University, is for any professionals that work with family forest owners. Cost: \$90 by Jan. 12. Website: www.uidaho.edu/FamilyForesterWorkshop

Saturday, Jan. 20

Sheep Producer Workshop — Small Flocks. Flying Mule Farm, 11515 Joeger Road, Auburn, Calif. This is the small flock version of the workshop presented by the California Wool Growers Association on improving lamb marketing and quality as well as producer profitability. To register contact the CWGA office at info@woolgrowers.org or (916) 444-8122.

Tuesday-Thursday

Jan. 23-25

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Riverside Hotel, 2900 W. Chinden Blvd., Boise. Food Safety Specialist and Assistant Professor Jeff Kronenberg of Tech-Help and the University of Idaho will host a 2.5 Day FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food Course Jan. 23-25 in Boise. He will be joined by Joshua Bevan, director of the Food Technology Center in the College of Agricultural Life and Sciences at the University of Idaho. Cost: \$725. Website: http://www.techhelp.org/events/385/fspcaboise2018/