

Astoria Farms branches into Portland market

By **LUKE WHITTAKER**

Coast River Business Journal

ASTORIA — The fall has historically been a brutal season for Clatsop County cannabis farmers, when a tsunami of outdoor marijuana would flood local markets and wreck wholesale prices for licensed growers.

The past two years in particular have been a rollercoaster ride for Astoria Farms owner Josh Staley, who watched his premium pot wholesale price fall precipitously before rebounding in 2019.

Staley said there's been less market volatility as demand increases for top-quality indoor marijuana while outdoor crops have been increasingly converted into concentrates, instead of appearing as discount flower on store shelves.

"There's been a little bit of a dip but not like last year, when it seemed like prices had fallen off a cliff," Staley said. "The season after it went down (2017) it stayed down until last year but it's been climbing steadily through this year."

Staley said wholesale prices for indoor pot bottomed out around \$1,300 a pound before rising to around \$2,000 currently.

"Things are moving quickly and prices have gone way up from what they were. Some of the really high-end stuff is going above \$2,000. The market has been speaking to 'indoor' as far as purchasing flower — it's what the public wants. A lot of the outdoor crop has been going straight to processors. It took a few years of people buying \$3 grams to realize there's a reason it's that price."

Premium marijuana headed to Portland

Staley previously sold his pot direct to local dispensaries in Astoria, but has since shifted to the Portland wholesale market, where his craft cannabis can fetch top dollar in boutique city shops.

Staley delivers to an intermediary



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Staley grows rare and unique strains. His 'Thai Pearl,' a variation of the popular 90s 'Juicy Fruit' strain, is highly coveted.



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Staley said the Portland demographic favors flower, where concentrates are more popular on the coast. "The percentage of flower sold in Astoria isn't very high compared to Portland shops. It's more of a dab town," he said.

who then distributes the product to various Portland pot stores for a fee. The ease of the process, instead of having

to deliver to each store individually as before, is part of the appeal, Staley said.

"I drive, drop it off then I'm free. I liked being in local shops and interacting with people directly here, but it hasn't been working out."

Another reason was the required \$2 million in liability insurance required by his former dispensary, which Staley said was unaffordable for his small operation.

Staley has since sold his last four batches to Portland dispensaries, where his unique strain 'Thai Pearl,' a variation of the popular 1990s 'Juicy Fruit,' has emerged as an early favorite.

"It seems to have the most universal appeal," he said.

Staley said the Portland demographic overall seems to favor flower compared to the coast where concentrates are more popular.

"The percentage of flower sold in Astoria isn't very high compared to Portland shops. It's more of a dab town,"

he said.

Staley could potentially return to area stores, but has no immediate plans as local demand continues to favor concentrates.

"A lot of the younger people like the dabs, oils and vape pens for their convenience. They can take a few light puffs and it's like a mild alteration compared to a heavier bong hit."

Lights, camera, crackdown

Clatsop County currently has 19 retailers and 8 licensed growers, compared to three retailers and 21 licensed growers and processors in Pacific County.

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) regulates licensed marijuana growers requiring specific rules regarding production. One particular requirement stipulates that licensed grows must have 24-hour camera surveillance covering the entire grow area with the recordings stored or saved for a minimum of 90 days.

"It was 30 days when they first came out then they changed it to 90 days (in August 2016)," Staley said. "They started cracking down on it."

The requirement is somewhat overkill, according to Staley, adding that it's increasingly expensive to invest in the necessary hard drives needed for storage.

"There's no other industry that's as watched over. Ninety days is a long time to keep cameras recording 24/7. I've got seven hard drives with 30 terabytes of storage, which gives me about 100 days or a little over," he said.

Staley has 14 cameras rolling at all times to adequately cover his roughly closet-sized grow.

Any equipment failure or power outages lasting 30 minutes or more, where potential recordings could be lost, are required to be reported to the commission, according to the OLCC. A failure to comply may result in license revocation.