

It's an appealing story and, in one sense, true — though Monsanto might have something to say about that. A bit harsher take of truth suggests that, since the thawing of prohibition, weed is born free but is everywhere in chains. As a legit product on the capitalist market, cannabis is now subject to the severe forces of mainstream supply and demand — the same as, say, corn or beef.

The devious goads to mass agricultural production — pesticides, chemical fertilizers, big-scale water and energy consumption, to name a few — are concerns for local cannabis producers who are making sustainability their calling card.

Micah Griffin, a local cannabis producer who prides himself on the sustainability of his process, says that too many growers have a “huge carbon footprint that is through the roof.”

Avoiding products like store-bought fertilizers and pesticides, Griffin cultivates his own soil in a “closed-loop” system that is organic and self-recycling, using compost like coffee grounds along with manure (though not bat guano, the extraction of which destroys the bats' habitat, he explains). His process is no-till, meaning the soil is layered upward in strata that are crawling with worms, whose poop further fertilizes the plants.

“It's a sensibility,” Griffin says of creating sustainable cannabis harvests. He points out that “cost-effective” and “sustainable” need not be mutually exclusive terms, necessarily; left to its own natural processes, he says, his soil becomes richer and richer, as opposed to him having to constantly flush it and pour in more chemical product.

In short, Griffin says, the soil takes care of itself, generating microbes and nutrients that prevent damaging molds and insects, making additives unnecessary (when required, he sprays for insects and mold with compost tea or leach from the worm bin, he says). Indeed, the foundational soil is rich, thick and moist, like dark chocolate, though with little scent; running your hands through it is like feeling life itself.

At one point, Griffin grabs a handful of the soil and puts it in his mouth. “It's totally clean,” he says, smiling.

A remarkable consistency occurs when talking with cannabis growers who are focused on sustainable practices; they all speak of the “closed-loop” system, for instance, in which chemical products are avoided in lieu of processes that, with careful and conscious stewardship, allow nature to take care of itself, all with an eye on reducing the impact of energy and water consumption.

At Cannassentials in west Eugene, grower Shane Kramer also uses a “closed-loop” system that focuses on practices that are entirely holistic and regenerating,



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

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methods Kramer first learned as an organic food farmer. He says that, despite the labor-intensive requirements of the process, sustainability just makes sense.

“The sustainable model is viable because, although production may be slightly lower, the cost of production is not increased but transferred to more labor, which equals creating jobs, which are needed, instead of polluting machinery and chemicals,” Kramer says. “In a closed-loop system where fertility is produced on farm, the production can go from sustainable to regenerative,” he adds, noting that using sustainable practices typically results in the ecosystem largely managing itself, from pest and mold control to sustenance and fertilization.

Kramer — who this past weekend won the GanjaCup indoor flower award at Portland's GanjaCon with his Sour Diesel entry — says that sustainable practices, for all the environmental benefits, also produce better, safer weed. “A quality, clean product is more desirable and easier to market,” he explains, “and a healthy consumer is a long-term customer.”

Award-winning cannabis grower Adam Jacques at Oregon Microgrowers Guild says that the ethic of sustainability runs through every part of his operation. “My whole farm is built around it,” he says, noting that he's currently using LED lighting, which cuts way back on electricity use. He's installing solar panels in his greenhouse as well as a rain-collection system to further cut back on energy consumption, which he says can be a major concern for the cannabis industry at large.

Jacques also uses a no-till system with no chemical additives — “probably the craziest spray I use is hydrogen peroxide,” he says — which both improves water retention in the soil and minimizes the impact of what leeches back into the water supply. “We pretty much run with zero runoff in our drains,” he adds.

“We're going to do what's best and greenest for the environment, because that's who we are,” Jacques says, adding that focusing on organic, sustainable practices creates a better product in the end — richer, tastier buds, with a fuller profile of terpenes that gives the cannabis a completeness not found in weed that is amped-up and sped-up by chemical fertilizers. The analogy with the beef industry is clear: Hormone-fed cattle might grow faster and plumper, but its quality is questionable and its safety even more so.

“We've built our business on trust,” Jacques says, pointing out the similarities in cannabis production with the organic food industry as a whole. “Let's say you go to a Fred Meyer and there's a health food sections,” he says with a smile. “What are the other sections?” ■

ADAM JACQUES



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SHANE KRAMER

