

# Too Legit To Quit

## Black Market Pot After Legalization

BY RICK LEVIN



**A**fter the fireworks, there's still the smoke. The legalization of retail weed in Oregon — a real Fourth of July moment for pot-heads — has left in its wake an enduring fug of legal, political and commercial questions that can make prohibition look like a cheerful stroll to the neighborhood dealer in comparison.

One of the major selling points for going legal, at least from the legislative standpoint, was the notion that hauling weed aboveboard would put the screws to the black market, eventually paralyzing all the criminal shenanigans that come with the illegal distribution of drugs. According to this argument, the commodification and careful regulation of marijuana would starve out the underground, taking pot off the streets and out of the hands of thugs, gangbangers and evil cartels.

Like so many issues surrounding weed in Oregon, the impact of legalization on the so-called black market remains to be seen. It's complicated. A causal survey of smokers in Eugene revealed to *EW* that many people are indeed now buying their smoke at dispensaries — surprising, perhaps, because the general sentiment prior to legalization was that underground weed would remain cheaper and better, keeping most established smokers tapping the black market.

As someone who's spent half her life in the underground marijuana industry, Bronwynn Dean says the idea that legalization will wipe out the black market is absurd. Dean, a Eugene writer (and occasional *EW* contributor) currently penning a collection of essays about her weed experiences, says an industry that's existed for decades won't simply go away because the product is now being taxed and stamped for stores.

"I'm talking about the guys that are moving multiple pounds on the regular," she explains. "I'm not talking about the dime bag. The guys that started growing 20 years ago got into it for a reason, and whatever reason that may be, it definitely has nothing to do with wanting to comply with authority."

The previously existing underground market is alive and well, Dean says, and she makes the important distinction between illicit dealers and folks producing and moving large quantities of weed. "None of them are ready to sign up to get their shit tagged and searched and all of the above. That's not why they do it."

Dean explains that the cost alone of going legit is prohibitive to this "good-old-boy network" of growers who have been producing quality weed for a long, long time. "I do know some major players who considered the cost of licensing and all the shit they have to jump through,"

she says of the process of going retail. "The cost alone, it's designed to drive down their profit and they're going to have to cut costs, and the shit's not going to be as good."

What's more, she says, most of the marijuana grown in Oregon is being sent out of state. "I would say that 90 percent of what's being grown here is getting shipped," Dean says.

Adam Jacques of Oregon Microgrowers Guild echoes Dean's sentiments. Jacques, an award-winning medical pot grower who will soon open a dispensary in Eugene, says that so long as retail pot remains illegal at the federal level as well as in most states, the black market will continue to exist. "Nationally, the black market's going to be a thing for a while," he explains. "There are always going to be states that require a large amount of cannabis that takes care of the people in that state who want cannabis. Weed from here goes everywhere."

As a medical marijuana provider who's also entering the retail market, Jacques points out that he's meticulous in following the legal requirements, down to counting every seed he produces and installing fencing and surveillance cameras. "There's no way that anybody who's working the regulatory system can get away with illegally selling stuff," he explains.

That said, Jacques says he believes everyone from con-

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— BRONWYNN DEAN, UNDERGROUND CANNABIS INDUSTRY VETERAN