

County Supervisors revisit potential cannabis policy for Yolo cultivators and consumers

By Hans Peter, Daily Democrat

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Yolo supervisors want to keep marijuana near at hand as they continue to trim potential policies that could one day lead to new agricultural highs — at least in terms of the economy.

Acting this past week, supervisors continued what has become a growing discussion about local marijuana policy, focusing in on how the county might regulate the growth and consumption of future cannabis plantations.

The agenda item was designed to not only update the board on current developing state regulations, but also to keep the issue under the eyes of local community leaders and agriculturalists, as policy decisions will affect the future of Yolo's cannabis economy.

Assistant County Administrator Mindi Nunes raised key questions that supervisors will be facing, the first of which was whether or not the county should even implement policy before the state has a chance to lay out its regulations.

"The state has been very vocal about wanting local input to their regulations," she said.

Yolo County is not included in the "Emerald Triangle," a region around Mendocino, Humboldt and Trinity counties known for having excellent growing conditions for cannabis. Though Yolo doesn't sport the name, it still has ideal conditions for the plant, and could harness that local industry preemptively, designing jurisdictionally based rules.

District 4 Supervisor Jim Provenza said creating local policy soon could be beneficial for Yolo County in terms of setting up a legitimate economy early on, but the process could dip into the county's general funds until the state develops policies on taxation.

"I think it could be putting the cart before the horse," Provenza said. "If we wait for the state regulations in some areas, we could choose those that we liked. If they were sufficient, then maybe we could go beyond state regulations and make them stricter, or maybe not as strict."

He also talked about the amount of hours staff has spent on cannabis issues and the implicit cost of spending so much time on something that could be subject to change.

Ron Chapman, the county's public health officer, brought up some of his concerns regarding the testing of the processed, ready-to-consume marijuana. He mentioned states such as Colorado and Washington, both of which have struggled to settle on the proper types of testing.

"This is a really complicated issue," he said. "There are just layers and we keep peeling and peeling and understanding, more and more, all of the issues."

He went on to say that testing of consumable cannabis should be no different from the state and county regulations pertaining to food, subject to same advertising and public education campaigns.

Agricultural Commissioner John Young said the agricultural involvement with cannabis should warrant regulations on a separate “raw materials” level.

He said unfortunately, getting crops and end products tested could be difficult.

“For whatever reason,” he said, “counties and cities cannot use state labs.”

This would subject Yolo to third-party testers, forcing them to come up with their own measures and standards, costing money along the way.

When supervisors opened the floor to the public, several additional variables entered the conversation, including concerns for cannabis-related industries and whether or not local regulations could potentially cut off medicinal users from their supplies as they begin to apply.

District 1 Supervisor Oscar Villegas said the talks of funding only increased his concerns about whether or not the county would need to use general funds, something he said he believed the county would not do.

“I’m just worried that what I thought was a good idea ... is going to leave everybody from the room with unrealistic expectations of what we can do in the absence of an initiative,” Villegas said. “Maybe we should take a deep breath and step back.”

Provenza said he shared similar worries.

“I’m suggesting that we take one thing at a time, do it right,” he said. “I don’t think we need to do everything at the same time. I think that’s how we’ll make mistakes and that’s how we’ll tie up our staff.”

The board agreed to have staff revisit the cultivation ordinance with any suggested changes. Staff will also research testing methods and a “track & trace” that could be done on processed and unprocessed marijuana.