

Report: Southern Oregon Hemp Testing Reveals Large Amounts Of Illicit Marijuana

Jefferson Public Radio | By [Erik Neumann](#)

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Erik Neumann/JPR /

A hemp field in Jackson County shrouded by wildfire smoke.

A member of the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission presented initial results of a crackdown on illegal marijuana production posing as legal hemp in Jackson and Josephine

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Fifty-four percent of the farms licensed to grow hemp that were inspected by state officials were found to be growing illegal marijuana, according to Richard Evans, senior director of licensing and compliance with OLCC, who presented information to the commission.

Under the moniker “Operation Table Rock,” named after a nearby volcanic plateau outside of Medford, OLCC and the Oregon Department of Agriculture tested plants at 212 registered hemp grows in the two counties. There are 335 total registered sites in the region. Those numbers don’t take into account additional farms growing hemp or marijuana without any registration.

There were another 76 farms that declined to allow inspectors on the property, and another 23 farms where inspectors were unable to make contact.

“I believe from my experience down there, there are more illegal grows than there are registered grows,” Evans says.

Jackson and Josephine counties lead the state in hemp and recreational marijuana production. In an effort to reign in an explosion of what many believe is illicit marijuana, posing as licensed hemp operations, state lawmakers passed HB 3000 in July. It allowed the agriculture department to partner with OLCC and local law enforcement to access and test crops on cannabis farms in Southern Oregon.

“The quality of life in Southern Oregon is the number one complaint from the citizens down there,” Evans says. “Whether they have armed guards out in front of the marijuana grow in front of their house, water rights, the [cannabis] smell, the human trafficking issues – the folks working in the field – this is a human atrocity in my mind.”

Law enforcement noted numerous water diversions from rivers and creeks, farms without bathrooms for workers, and poor living conditions, like people living in tents inside greenhouses, according to the presentation.

Representatives from cannabis groups including the Oregon Cannabis Association, Hemp Industries Association and Oregon Industrial Hemp Farmers Association did not respond to a request for comment about the impact of HB 3000.

Illicit marijuana farming also has major impacts on Oregon’s legal recreational marijuana market. Evans cited illicit growers paying exorbitant amounts of cash for property, labor, and water rights as ways that they’re outcompeting legal growers.

“If you’re playing by the rules in our recreational market, you’re playing behind the eight ball,” he says.

Clarification: An earlier version of this story stated that fifty-eight percent of farms licensed to grow hemp were found to be growing illegal marijuana. OLCC later contacted JPR to clarify that the number was 54 percent. That’s the percentage of licensed hemp farms inspected by state officials found to be growing illegal marijuana. As stated in the story, state officials inspected 212 of the 335 registered hemp farms in

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