

The Reality of Safely Cultivating – Legal, Organic and Safe

Presented by

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Introduction

Our involvement with legal cannabis cultivation began unexpectedly. A relative, with Parkinson's Disease, asked us to find information about the Health Canada medical cannabis access program. After researching the government program, we utilized our skills as a teacher and a web-designer and compiled our findings into a website – medicalmarihuana.ca. We began to get emails from across Canada; patients were asking for growers to supply them with medical marijuana. We became authorized designated growers and started Island Harvest, a certified organic medical marijuana growing operation.

Since 2002, we have been licenced through the Federal Government's Marihuana Medical Access Regulations to cultivate, distribute and sell medical cannabis to authorized Canadian patients. We have our organic certification for the production of cannabis from the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia. The COABC regulations are administered by B.C.'s Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

As legally authorized producers of cannabis in our community, we have experienced encouragement and support from the public: trades-people, (electricians, plumbers and fire department officials) pharmacists, family, friends, business owners, nurseries, horticultural centers and the agricultural sector. We have discovered that our community supports our legalized cultivation, distribution and sales of medical cannabis.

To address the reality of safe cultivation within a legal government regulatory system, we will present our first hand experience as legal, licenced cannabis growers in regards to building safety, product security, and cultivation methods. We will contrast our experience as legal growers with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the Ontario Provincial Police "Green Tide - Marijuana Cultivation and Its Impact on Ontario", a report on marijuana grow operations.

In the following presentation sections on "Building Safety", "Product Security" and "Safe Cultivation", we have included referenced quotes from the Ontario "Green Tide" report.

Building Safety

In the production of any indoor or outdoor agricultural crop, there are specific concerns that need to be addressed. The cultivation of cannabis is the same as other agricultural crop. The plant requires light, water and food - preferably in an optimal environment to achieve a good consistent quality product. Growing cannabis has very basic cultivation, safety and environmental requirements.

The authors of Ontario's "Green Tide" study comment that:

"... a grow op can inflict significant structural damage on the dwellings in which the operation is housed." - p.22 Green Tide

With indoor growing - lighting and ventilation needs are important. Agricultural high-intensity discharge lights require an adequate supply of power. Therefore the electrical supply component is vital to ensure safe and sufficient power needs. In any residential or commercial structure, a professional electrical installation and inspection is typical. For our cannabis production facility, we had an electrician install a new breaker panel, wire and conduct a complete inspection to ensure safety.

We consult with building trades, engineers and horticultural experts on the use of effective ventilation systems and moisture barriers. With the use of state of the art technology, new materials and simple installation techniques, no structural damage will occur to any building from the cultivation of an agricultural crop - including cannabis.

Product Security

The writers of the "Green Tide" report continue with the following statement:

"The potential for violence in and around a grow-op is also very real"
- p.8 Green Tide

As legal growers, we have never experienced any problem associated with any security issue or violence in relationship to our cultivation of cannabis. Common sense prevails when it comes to cannabis crop security.

Due to the current nature of cannabis prohibition and crop values, security needs addressing. Some basic security measures are necessary to ensure that the crop is suitably protected from break-ins and/or theft.

Good quality locks and doors are important, as are the basic requirements of keeping your facility locked, monitored and protected in some way. Any appropriate device can achieve this, such as motion detectors, alarm systems and/or the ownership of large dogs. Use of fences, bright lighting and a constant perceived presence around the cannabis growing location will provide added security.

Beyond prohibition, security will not be such an issue because the regulated cannabis infrastructure will provide an open and adequate public market. Thus market value of cannabis will be reflected by a legal supply and demand, and cannabis prices will drop.

Safe Cultivation

Like any agricultural crop for human consumption, the cultivation of cannabis should adhere to regulations and guidelines that reflect the safe production of a consumer food product. We maintain safe crop management standards and follow certified organic food production guidelines as set out by the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia, who are regulated by B.C.'s Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

In the "Green Tide" report, the authors note:

"In addition to the problem of mould, grow ops also raise the specter of toxic smoke as well as land and groundwater contamination." - p.30 Green Tide

As legal certified organic cannabis growers we are required to maintain strict crop production records, and we document all plant input that we use in the production and management of our cannabis crops. All the products we use are fully approved to certified organic food production standards, and we are inspected by third parties to ensure that we meet all the applicable COABC criteria.

We installed a simple efficient ventilation system to eliminate moisture and to control humidity. There are no environmental or toxicity hazards in any of the products we use in our certified organic cannabis production. We cultivate in a safe and environmentally friendly way to ensure our cannabis product is to the highest standards for consumer use. Our customers attest to the product's quality. We use no pesticides, no herbicides, no insecticides, and no chemicals or synthetic fertilizers. The reality is that cannabis can be grown safely and responsibly.

The "Green Tide" authors also note:

"Children are at risk from grow op activity" - p.5 Green Tide

As legal growers, we can be honest and open about our cannabis cultivation. We're able to call upon licenced trades people such as electricians, plumbers and technicians when we need industry support or horticultural assistance. We have been inspected and checked for all aspects of safety by licenced and certified trade professionals.

To grow legal cannabis is to be involved in the agricultural sector. It is greenhouse production work. With organic farming to certified organic standards, there are no extraordinary or inherent risks associated with the crop production, maintenance, drying, packaging or shipping. From our experience as legal cannabis growers and as parents, we perceive minimal risk to children from these specific farm-related activities.

The “Green Tide” report imparts a list of stereotypical myths about marijuana grow-ops and provides the public with a substantial document of evidence against prohibition. In reality, we have found that the cultivation and distribution of cannabis under a legally regulated system is safe - and no different than growing any agricultural crop.

Conclusion

Although, it is apparent that some people have developed a negative perception of cannabis production due to misconstrued information perpetuated by law enforcement and government, it is demonstrated by our experience, that marijuana grow-ops can be operated safely, professionally and responsibly within any community. As legally regulated cannabis cultivators in our community, we experience support from the public.

The Green Tide document is an excellent statistical research study that provides valuable information supporting the legalization of cannabis. Every point in the study makes a very strong case against the continued prohibition of cannabis, and supports the conclusion found in the recent Senate Committee report. Canadian society is ready to adopt a safe and legally regulated public cannabis system.

In the past two years of our private sector cannabis production, distribution and sales at Island Harvest, we have never experienced a single problem with our facility, security or cultivation. As legally licenced cannabis growers, under the approval from the federal government's Marihuana Medical Access Regulations, and in conjunction with our organic certification from the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia, we conclude from our first hand practical experience and knowledge that a legal, safe, cannabis regulatory system can function within Canadian society.