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Guest Commentary

Andrew Rice: Clarifying cannabis comments on per-parcel acreage

From the Complete Series - Green Rush in the 805?: Cannabis on the Central Coast - Looking at land use, money, science, law enforcement and education series

Sep 5, 2019

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A recent guest commentary by Sharyne Merritt about capping per-parcel cannabis acreage contained statements that need some clarification.

The first: “Grape growers have been threatened by pot growers with lawsuits for spraying mildew-fighting fungicide.”

A farmer can’t be sued for properly spraying pesticides or fungicides on his or her own grapes. Anyone who is advocating in favor of drift and overspray is flying in the face of basic good practices that every farmer knows to follow.

All farmers, under California Code of Regulations, Title 3, Division 6, Section 6614, are liable for any damage caused if they apply their ag chemicals to someone else’s property, home, school or crops. Cannabis gets no special treatment.

To our knowledge, there haven’t been any lawsuits threatened or filed in our area over any incident of overspray or drift onto legal cannabis. The county Ag Commissioner’s office has a conflict resolution program designed to facilitate farmer-to-farmer

settlement of any such issues. The North County Farmer's Guild supports this program and encourages it as the first recourse when any crops (cannabis or otherwise) are alleged to be damaged by ag chemical overspray or drift.

Secondly, Merritt states that "tasting rooms have closed because of odor from neighboring pot grows." That's simply not true. In the time that sun-grown outdoor cannabis growing has been legal in Santa Barbara County, the number of tasting rooms in the area has increased, not declined.

Most recently, in May 2019, Peake Winery opened a new tasting room on Santa Rosa road in the immediate vicinity of several outdoor cannabis farms, and its owner was cited in a local newspaper stating that business there is steady, with every weekend doing better than the last.

Finally, Merritt proposes limiting cannabis grows to no more than 1 acre. Or to grow it all indoors. Like all kinds of farming, there are economies of scale to growing cannabis. It's not possible to commercially farm 1 acre of cannabis. And growing cannabis indoors is bad for the environment because it takes massive energy from the local electrical grid.

Essentially, what she's proposing is that Santa Barbara County throw away the thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue already created by growers of legal cannabis in the county. That will hurt the local economy and workers and vendors who've been re-investing and expanding their operations in the region.

To the degree there are conflicts between neighboring farmers about pesticide spraying or the smell of drying crops, the solution is to talk to each other, to work together to find mutual solutions. The North County Farmers Guild invites Merritt and any other Santa Ynez Valley farmer to come to Industrial Eats on Sept. 11 between 6 and 8 p.m. to dine and drink wine with their fellow farmers at “Together We Thrive,” a panel discussion with representatives of wineries, grape growers, and legal cannabis farmers about issues of concern to all of us.

Andrew Rice is the communications chair of the North County Farmers Guild, an organization dedicated to promoting best practices in sun-grown, legal, outdoor cannabis cultivation goodfarmersgreatneighbors.com. He can be reached at Andrew@goodfarmersgreatneighbors.com.

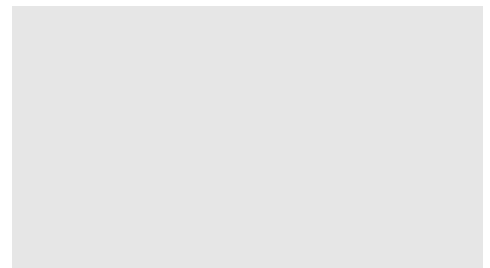
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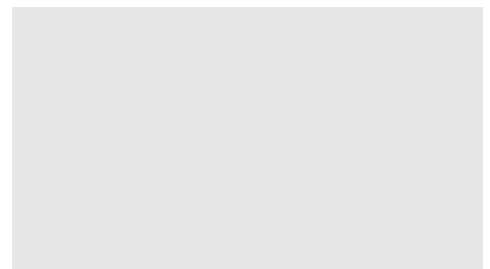
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