

The Emerald Cup: California's Annual Celebration of All Things Cannabis

The new year is literally around the corner, and with it, the start of Prop-64 sanctioned legal recreational cannabis use for Californians 21 and over. Of course the Golden State is no stranger to the leafy crop: medical marijuana has been legal here for more than two decades.

With a new law comes new regulations, and hopeful cannapreneurs, as well as owners and operators of existing medical marijuana dispensaries, have been rapt audiences as state agencies and municipal regulators have released licensing and operating guidelines over the past few months.

But earlier this month, an annual event took place that — perhaps refreshingly to marijuana businesspeople needing a break from submitting applications for new licenses — had nothing to do with regulating the legal cannabis industry in California, but had everything to do with the enthusiasm and essence of longtime marijuana growers and sellers...and maybe even cannabis itself.

From judging to sampling, the Cup appeals to pro-cannabis consumers and operators alike

For nearly a decade-and-a-half, cannabis cultivators in the mountains of the Emerald Triangle have celebrated the wrap-up of their harvests by participating in the “Emerald Cup,” a two-day festival held at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds (interestingly enough, the same location that firefighters used as home base while they battled wildfires in the Santa Rosa wine country).

As you'd expect with any county fair, the Emerald Cup includes the competitive spirit (except these judges won't be assessing livestock or pinning a blue ribbon on a quilt).

There's much more to the event than recognizing exceptional plants or products, however (and the coveted prizes do have serious cachet in the industry). The fair also serves as a networking event for cannapreneurs; a place for industry education (for example, education in the form of panel discussions; this time around, one talk was entitled “What to Expect on January 2, 2018”); and a marketplace for organic things (like seeds) and inorganic (like farming or manufacturing equipment).

Those in the business of growing or selling marijuana are not the only ones who look forward to the Emerald Cup: thousands of the general public attend the fair, enjoying live music, fair food, and samples of cannabis products.

Legalization comes with a score of unknowns, especially for small-scale farmers

Marijuana legalization may come as a relief to many, especially those negatively and disproportionately impacted by the decades-old so-called “war on drugs” that made marijuana a Schedule I drug at the federal level (alongside substances like heroin and Ecstasy; and the illicit nature of cannabis federally is not likely to change anytime soon). However, many others in the industry, especially those running small grow operations, may view legalization with dismay, and might point to the numbers to justify that mixed emotion: the price per pound of cannabis was \$1,500 a year ago...it's around \$500 now.

Tim Blake is a cannapreneur and the founder of the Emerald Cup (14 years ago it was held in a field near his Mendocino home; now it's the largest canna-fair in the country and brings in so much cash that it's not unheard of



for ATMs on the fairgrounds to be emptied over the course of the weekend).

Speaking about the start of legalized weed in the state, Blake, echoing some of the fears of legalization from longtime, relatively small growers, had this to say to the *Los Angeles Times*: "The old-school guys up in the mountains, growing their 250 pounds, a lot of them are not going to make the transition very well. They don't grow enough, the prices aren't high enough, they don't want to go through the permit process. It's really a tragedy in the sense that a lot of the people that built the industry and pushed for legalization are going to get left behind."

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