UC Agriculture & Natural Resources
California Agriculture

Title
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Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0zg5p54r

Journal
California Agriculture, 73(3)

ISSN
0008-0845

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Publication Date
2019

DOI
10.3733/ca.2019a0022

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A concise cannabis guide: History, laws and regulations

1937 The Marijuana Tax Act is signed into federal law. The Act, though it does not explicitly outlaw cannabis, establishes tight restrictions that effectively prohibit its sale and use.

1970 The Controlled Substances Act, a federal law, establishes schedules that categorize drugs according to their perceived medical utility and potential for abuse. Cannabis, along with heroin and LSD, is assigned to the highly restrictive Schedule I. As a result, even scientists face great difficulty in obtaining cannabis for research purposes.

1996 California voters approve the Compassionate Use Act, legalizing medical cannabis in the state. For the next 19 years, California's medical cannabis industry operates essentially unregulated.

2015 The California Legislature passes and Gov. Brown signs the Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act (later renamed the "Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act"). The law establishes a three-agency regulatory structure for cannabis activities.

2016 California voters approve Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act, which legalizes on the state level the cultivation, possession, sale and use of recreational cannabis.

2017 The Legislature passes the Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act, integrating Proposition 64 and the Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act, thus establishing a combined regulatory system for medical and adult-use cannabis in California.

California's cannabis regulators

Agency	Bureau of Cannabis Control	Manufactured Cannabis Safety Branch	CalCannabis Cultivation Licensing
Parent organization	Department of Consumer Affairs	Department of Public Health	Department of Food and Agriculture
Primary activities	Licenses and regulates cannabis retailers, distributors, microbusinesses, testing laboratories and temporary events; is designated as state's lead cannabis agency	Regulates manufacturing of cannabis products such as extracts and edibles, ensuring that products are properly packaged and labeled and are free of contaminants	Licenses and regulates cannabis cultivators; implements the state's track-and-trace system, which follows the movement of cannabis from seed to sale

What cannabis activities are allowed — and where?

While state law provides for the cultivation and manufacture of cannabis and its sale in retail stores, cities and counties may pass ordinances banning these activities. Localities without explicit bans on cannabis activities also may effectively ban them through, for example, zoning ordinances (certain activities, such as delivery of cannabis from a different jurisdiction, may not be banned). The table below gives examples of what is allowed in a few cities and counties.

Location	Commercial cultivation	Manufacturing	Adult-use retail stores
State of California	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Selected cities			
Anaheim	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Portola	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Selected counties			
Kern County	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Orange County	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
Santa Barbara County	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Tehama County	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited
A city/county split*			
Oakland	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Alameda County	Allowed	Prohibited	Allowed

* Where city and county ordinances differ, the city's ordinance applies within its boundaries.

Online: https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2019a0022