

Hello,

I am writing today to share my experience with the Mendocino Cannabis Program since my application in 2017. We are still embossed receipt holders and have not received a permit by the county. Our submissions back in 2017 had everything required. We were told by a former employee named Steve that all was submitted after a couple additions were requested in the following month to a year and ended up waiting. When I emailed him back after a few months had passed by with no word, I was met with a mailing error/returned email - that the email no longer existed. This was concerning, we had not been notified of a transfer of our application to a new staff member, or that Steve was no longer a part of the program. We called and sent out other emails. We finally got a new staff member assigned to our application who has been with us ever since - for the last 5 years, processing our application.

We have 2 parcels adjacent to each other owned by the same person. During the 2017 application process they did not allow us to submit just one permit application under these parcels - it had to be two separate permits - they have since changed this requirement and now allow other applicants to be permitted under 2 adjacent parcels by the same owner under one permit. This has caused us to have two 5,000 sq ft applications/licenses with both the county and the state. All of our paperwork must be separated and doubled, our Metrc compliance, our transfers, everything cost double because we have to oblige by this outdated requirement, unless we wish to cancel our two permits and start all over, since the county nor the state does not allow us to merge or update our sq footage. This has been quite the inconvenience, but we deal with it, because we don't really have a better option.

In 2020 when the August Complex fires came about 2 miles from our home and we lost over 200lbs of flower due to the smoke and lack of sun which caused the flower to be unable to grow any further, we took a huge hit on our business income. Along with the current state of the market right now, we have been set back into the red - we have had to tap into our savings for the last year and half to keep our operations going. We have had to cut back every single cost we could think of and let go of all of our employees, we now do the work of 5 employees between the 2 of us. It has been stressful, tiring, scary, and depressing to say the least. In 2021 I had my second miscarriage and developed a herniated disc in my lower back, my husband has also been recovering from a bulging disc that occurred in 2020. It has been completely debilitating and very costly to see a chiropractor once a week in order to heal ourselves. Back issues like this flare up from chronic stress which we definitely attribute to the cannabis permitting process and occur over many years of doing repetitive movements like weighing wet weight plants for Metrc.

Also after the fires in 2020 we decided we would like to submit a building permit to build a fireproof home in order for our family to feel safe enough to continue living in Mendocino County. The first thing we did was speak to our cannabis program assignee about what we would need to do in order for this not to have an impact on our applications. To build the house where we needed it to go would require us to merge our 2 parcels in order for us to meet setback requirements. I spoke to our assignee and asked her specifically if this would be effect our application statuses - there would be a change in the parcel number on the two applications. She assured me we were fine because we would not be going over the sqft allowance of 10k. I had multiple conversations with her

about this to confirm and felt confident at that point to submit a Boundary Line Adjustment so we could go ahead and prepare our land for the fireproof home building application.

About 3 months after submitting this adjustment and it being approved by the county, my cannabis program assignee sent me an email telling me she wanted to speak to me over the phone. We connected over the phone and she told me: she made an error in what she told us prior and there was now a problem. She told me I would have to cancel my permit applications and reapply because of the parcel merge. At that point, I was ready to give up, after being misled by my cannabis program assignee. I felt lied to and as if this was some kind of way to push us completely out of the program. It made no sense to me, why would the county want a regenerative farm to lose? Why would the county not be encouraging, even incentivizing with tax breaks, farms like ours, who break their backs and give everything they have of themselves to create a better ecosystem and help with our climate disasters? We give back to our communities through monetary and voluntary donations, build up the soil with only local ingredients, we buy nothing out of the county or in plastic bags, all soil is made on the farm, we support local businesses, we practice methods that help with retaining water, create carbon sequestration, introduce native plant and insect species back into the environment. Why was this happening to us?

I hung up with her, as she continued providing me with false information. I called the state and the county assessor's office and they both informed me that parcel numbers change all the time, and it should simply be an administrative amendment. The rest of the applications are completely the same, just the last three digits will be changed on the APN lines. I wrote back to our county

assignee and shared this information and she simply stated in return that she will need all the assessor's paperwork submitted once it is ready. No apology on her behalf in the email for the misinformation. I haven't heard back from her since mid 2021, and the assessor's office is still in the process of changing the APNs so we will see how it all goes. Hopefully we don't have to do more than a simple administrative amendment.

The most recent information we have heard from the county was about CEQA and the whole mess that that situation is as well. We paid a biologist thousands of dollars to do our Appendix G and a biological survey only for the county and state to return it back to us wanting an additional fauna survey since a flora survey and the rest of the 33 page document was not enough. It is details like this, without an actual county inspector who comes to see our farm (we only had one many years ago) to see the value in what we are doing, who tries to work WITH us and not against us, that is so hard for us to cope with. We just want a county program that respects and sees our efforts, we are beyond willing to make changes or even do extra work to appease the county. We want nothing more than to continue being a helpful member to our community, with a permitted farm and a successful livelihood that can support our family. With the current state of the cannabis market in prices that bring farmers to a complete loss and the cannabis program seemingly against us this feels further and further away from our grasp.

We still have to pay the county taxes on crops that have been lost and as far as the equity grant or filing appeals goes, we haven't even bothered to apply as we have only heard more horror stories of how the county cannabis program continues to make it difficult to receive anything and it seems like more of a trouble than it is

worth. Honestly, I am concerned to even make this letter public, and hope that our applications will not be compromised because of it. We are constantly on the edge, stressed out and living in the seat of the unknown, while our health and well being continues to suffer. These are hard times for any cultivator in the Emerald Triangle. Instead of being uplifted by our county to succeed *together* and implementing programs like the BMPs to give recognition and assist in the exemplary education of how to grow cannabis that is helpful and not harmful to our environment with the unique ability that Mendocino County has in producing cannabis outdoors, it feels as though we are being pushed out of the county instead. The farms of this community make Mendocino County what it is, in many ways. We have always been a backbone here, but yet the backbone is degenerating, and it seems as if the county doesn't care. How long will the county cannabis program and it's operating officials continue to ignore this huge loss of our community? It does not feel like very long until the last of us have fled.

We hope this can change, there is still time to work together and create a successful cannabis industry in the county of Mendocino that cares for and uplifts their small family owned farms.

We would also like to express our support for memos submitted by Hannah Nelson, Covelo Cannabis Advocacy Group, and the Mendocino Cannabis Alliance.

In High Regards,

Patricia Vargas de Gauder

SUN ROOTS FARM