

Hello my name is Nichole Norris, I am a freelance reporter who has been covering the impacts of the Humboldt County abatement program for years. I also work part time for a law office and was an abatement specialist working with about 100 victims of the program. I am speaking out today against the abatement program being proposed by Mendocino County.

In the time I've covered this issue and working with people on the front lines I have seen so much injustice, so many people afraid to lose everything they have. I've witnessed countless environmentalists devastated by false accusations, held liable for logging legacies, left paying thousands to hundreds of thousands to remedy issues they did not cause (ex. logging roads, culverts etc.). I've watched permaculturalist families forced by our Planning Dept to remove their organic soil, garden beds, and even a redwood chicken coop that had been standing for about 100 years.

I've watched our Planning Dept. falsely accuse countless people who grow vegetables in greenhouses, including our local nuns. I've seen people lose their modest RV housing, or have to remove their classic cars from their property and others who have had to fill in their compost toilets as a result of the program. Several abatement recipients are being cited for unpermitted homes. I have witnessed property owners doing what fire prevention experts advise them, then having to defend themselves for doing expensive fire preparedness work. I know of four different people who were stressed so much by the program and later died with their notices unresolved.

Out of the 100 abatements I've worked on, less than a handful deserved some sort of notice or resolution. The vast majority did not.

The abatement program fails to recognize that people would like to be in compliance but our permit process is too complex and expensive to navigate for most people, especially small farms. Small permaculture family farms are what made our region world famous. We should be offering authentic equity programs for locals who endured the war on drugs (via free small farm permits), but instead those small farms are cut out of legalization entirely. The abatement program is the nail in the coffin of Prop 64 and the social and cultural impacts are widespread.

I have watched countless families flee our area as a result of the abatement program, causing our schools to close down and those still open are failing. We do not have enough volunteer firefighters, teachers, baseball coaches, non profit workers, childcare workers etc. Property values are plummeting and some Humboldt residents are now filing to reduce their tax bills.

Our elders who made this product famous are reportedly afraid to cultivate 9 plants alongside vegetables in their backyards for their medicine and to survive. All while we watch mega mono-crop farms favored by our permit process have a free pass to cause harm without oversight. Few smaller farms have made it through the permit process so the purpose of the abatement program and legalization generally has been entirely lost.

While Humboldt County has sent notices to about 25% of people who had 4k sq ft and less in garden canopy (per satellite imagery), there were only 18 properties or 6% cited with 30k sq ft

cultivation areas and greater. One abated garden area from this year was 160 sq ft. The satellites make a lot of mistakes which cost immense time, stress and money to resolve.

The solutions forced on us by Humboldt County's Planning Dept. is not only wreaking havoc on our community economically and emotionally, but it is not serving the environment either. The environment is not impacted by someone paying a fine for grading who then gets a retroactive permit that allows the grading. I've met people who easily obtained a permit to clear cut their property in order to afford a permit to cultivate a plant. What is the difference to the environment between permitted plants and non-permitted plants? Nothing. This program does not serve the environment, it does not address the root issues around non-compliance and instead burdens property owners, vilifies off-grid living while sowing immense fear across our backyard gardening communities.

About 470 abatement warning letters went out last winter before the pandemic to many backyard gardeners, those with small vegetable greenhouses and 215s. I personally had to stop cultivating food year around in a very small greenhouse because my landlords were so afraid of the abatement program, and felt it was too much of a risk. My family went hungry during a pandemic as a direct result of this abatement program. We didn't even receive an abatement or warning letter. I used to grow food year-around even through snow storms in my greenhouse, now my garden in mid June pales in comparison to what I had in February last year. This is economically devastating, jeopardizes my health and families well being. It also goes against everything I stand for as a permaculturalist who aspires to live in harmony with the environment and provide for my own basic needs. My family is currently trying to relocate to Mendocino (or Oregon) to escape the abusive abatement program and get back to cultivating food year-around.

Please do not make the same mistake Humboldt County did and mark my words you will see Mendocino County survive legalization where Humboldt County will not.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nichole Norris

(My most recent article on the abatement program- <http://kymkemp.com/2020/05/22/penalties-fines-and-fees-a-deep-look-at-the-humboldt-county-cannabis-abatement-process/>)