

Dear Mendocino County Board of Supervisors,

This letter is in support of the proposed Phase 3 Mendocino Cannabis Cultivation Ordinance, and allowing RL, UR and AG parcels (over 10 acres minimum) to be permitted to cultivate up to 10% of their parcel area, upon approval of each specific/individual project.

I graduated from Laytonville High School and have lived & worked in Mendocino County much of my life. I left the area to obtain a college education and returned to be close to family and enjoy our rural quality of life. I am a parent now myself, and care very much about building & maintaining strong local communities that support our youth and provide them abundant opportunities to flourish. I maintain an active California Real Estate Salesperson License and have represented many clients over the years in real estate transactions driven or impacted by cannabis cultivation.

Currently, I work within the legal cannabis industry, for a privately-owned company based in Mendocino County. I am very proud to work for an organization that provides consistent, stable employment in our community. Our employees earn living wages, which has helped them afford dependable vehicles and maintain secure housing for their families. We additionally provide our employees a generous direct reimbursement benefit for health care expenses. Throughout this Coronavirus Pandemic, as an Essential Business, we have kept our employees safely working, with very minimal disruption.

I believe the Phase 3 Expansion is crucial for Mendocino County to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving legal cannabis industry. If we choose not to allow landowners to cultivate to scale, many will be affected negatively in our community.

As a lifelong local, I have caught wind of the diversity of perspectives on this topic among those I know, who represent all walks of life. I hear and respect the concerns expressed by those who choose to oppose this expansion. Unfortunately, I think some of their concerns are misplaced, based upon lack of understanding or inaccurate information.

It is my opinion that the most important thing to remember, in evaluating whether to move forward with Phase 3 Expansion, is that **each** project will continue to be evaluated on the merits of its compliance with **all** regulations and the project's potential/projected contribution(s) and impact on the community, **prior** to any approval. I do not interpret the proposed expansion to simply allow any and every RL or AG parcel over 10 acres to be permitted to cultivate up to 10% of their parcel area. Simply put, NOT every permit applied for will be issued/granted.

Cannabis is an agricultural crop that we continue evolving our capacity to efficiently regulate and tax. Our communities benefit tremendously from its contributions to the local economy. It is in our collective best interests to empower landowners who have the capacity to scale their operations to remain competitive.

With all that, I would like to directly address a few key points consistently raised by those opposed to Phase 3.

*Water Use – I’ve heard some suggest cannabis is depleting our water tables rapidly and unsustainably. I believe this is not being viewed accurately by those who cite it as a primary rationale for their opposition. They’re likely referring to operations they see or know of that have not been granted final approval or been fully evaluated for their environmental impact. The truth is, as with any agricultural crop, responsible farmers seek to conserve resources. Properly managed, cannabis as a crop requires less water to grow than grapes. Once again, with the proposed expansion, **each** project/permit will be **required** to thoroughly explain their water use and ensure its compliance with state and local regulations, prior to any final/long term approval.

*Willits Valley – I’ve heard it suggested the treasured Willits Valley is being overrun by the legal cannabis industry. My understanding is that as we sort out regulations (which I hope will include Phase 3 Expansion), many if not most/all of the current projects operating in the Willits Valley will not have the capacity to obtain final permitting/continue operating, for multiple reasons. It is also my understanding it is unlikely (if not impossible?), due to the sensitive dynamics of preserving remaining wetlands in the valley, for any properties in the Willits Valley to be permitted for increased cultivation as part of the Phase 3 Expansion.

*Existing projects claiming to be legal will continue – Many believe existing cultivation sites they see will be allowed to operate indefinitely. Due to Mendocino County’s thus far limited (yet constantly evolving) capacity to evaluate/regulate existing projects efficiently, this has developed as an inaccurate perspective. As we continue to build capacity to adequately regulate Mendocino County legal cannabis operations, this will change. Crucial in the ongoing efforts to create a sustainable local legal cannabis industry is building paths that will allow *some* appropriately positioned cultivators to scale operations. Projects currently operating on provisional licenses will be required to show full compliance before they are able to obtain final licensing. For most cannabis farmers, CEQA compliance is a known issue and limitation. In Mendocino County, we have many cultivators currently operating on provisional licenses that will not be able to continue once their provisional licenses expire, due to their inability to achieve CEQA compliance.

With all these considerations, I urge those tasked with developing policies and creating regulatory structure for commercial cannabis cultivation in Mendocino

County to approve the proposed Phase 3 Mendocino Cannabis Cultivation Ordinance. Doing so will generate significant tax revenue benefitting our communities and county and ensure that our responsible local cultivators can scale operations to remain competitive as farmers in the rapidly evolving legal cannabis industry. It is in all our best interests to empower our responsible local cultivators to shine and be at the forefront of developing best practices within the industry.

Sincerely,

Melissa Gribi,
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