

Dear Board of Supervisors and all here present,

We hope everyone is doing well.

Back in 2018, this Department called all cannabis growers from this county to present ourselves personally at the Agricultural Department, offering a clean path for us to finally come out of the darkness and stop being persecuted for growing medicine in our gardens. At that time our garden was no more than 1500 sq ft. We decided that from the options presented to us at our first meeting, 5000 sq ft was what we as a family could manage in a responsible way.

Previous to this call to step to the frontline, we were already enrolled since November 2015 on a third party program with the Regional Water Board, signing a contract for \$35,000, this contract was done with the purpose of preparing our homestead to be compliant with the water code state regulations. We could not believe we were being charge such an outrageous amount, little did we know, this was just the beginning of never ending payments to different agencies and this in order to prove that we were not committing any "criminal acts" against the environment and that we could be responsible business owners and operators. We trusted and proceeded.

In our case we had to build everything from the ground up, drying sheds, self distribution facilities, bigger green houses, rain water catchment and solar systems and also our small cabin with a septic system.

All the fees for these buildings, altogether with professional work done for the corresponding presentations to planning department, not to mention lawyers and other consultants that we had to afford to comply with all the State's requirements and actual licenses cost has made this process a burden only a few courageous and honorable individuals can take, our respect goes to every single one of them.

All this paperwork added to the accounting record keeping, metrc management and building we took into our own hands about two years ago to be able to keep operating.

At the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019, our harvest was handed to unknown licensed distributors that couldn't sell the product and after months all the harvest was given back to us; somebody recommended to ask for the self distribution to the tax department in order to have more of a chance for survival, we did, it was granted to us and it certainly helped since we were able to brand our own product.

But then when you add the cost of branding, marketing, distributing and practically becoming a tax collector for the State altogether with all the compliance with BCC to obtain the yearly provisional and annual license, this certainly becomes almost an impossible task for small operators like us. Now, let's add the cost of CEQA to all of this I am mentioning and having to be accomplished during a pandemic and all to see the prices for the flower drop more each year. Our last year's harvest has not being sold yet.

Today we are seeing retailers not opening doors, after all this arduous work. And we hear the phrase "we are not leaving small farmers and operators behind, while phase 3 comes to be established", with all due respect, this is not about leaving us behind, this only means one thing to us, we have become disposable, after we have given years of our lives to this and a great deal of our material resources, our savings, we will say that we feel like victims at this point, the damage and trauma we have faced throughout this process as individuals, as a family is really not reversible and all for the love and appreciation of a plant that we know is healing medicine and trusting the justice that was offered to the community through this process.

4/18/2021

Please let's not forget, we are homesteaders which means that we also grow food, take care of animals, live off grid and provide heat for ourselves during the cold seasons, also our own electricity and domestic water use, at the same time we are raising our kids. Let's add to this that in our case our farm is located 30 min from the nearest paved road, which has made all the building even harder to accomplish in the time given.

As responsible citizens we know that this has been hard not just for us but for our regulatory bodies as well, and we will suggest that a way to help us to finalize the completion for phase 1 and 2 operators is to be as flexible as possible, understanding the hardships we are taking to become transparent and this considering too that nothing is assured to us after even this is done, we farmers live by faith, faith that every year, the conditions and right timings will favor us with a successful harvest that will sustain us for just another year.

Thank you for your time and attending to our experience and concerns.

Sincerely,
Josh and Yeins Chestnut
Lost Paradise Organics