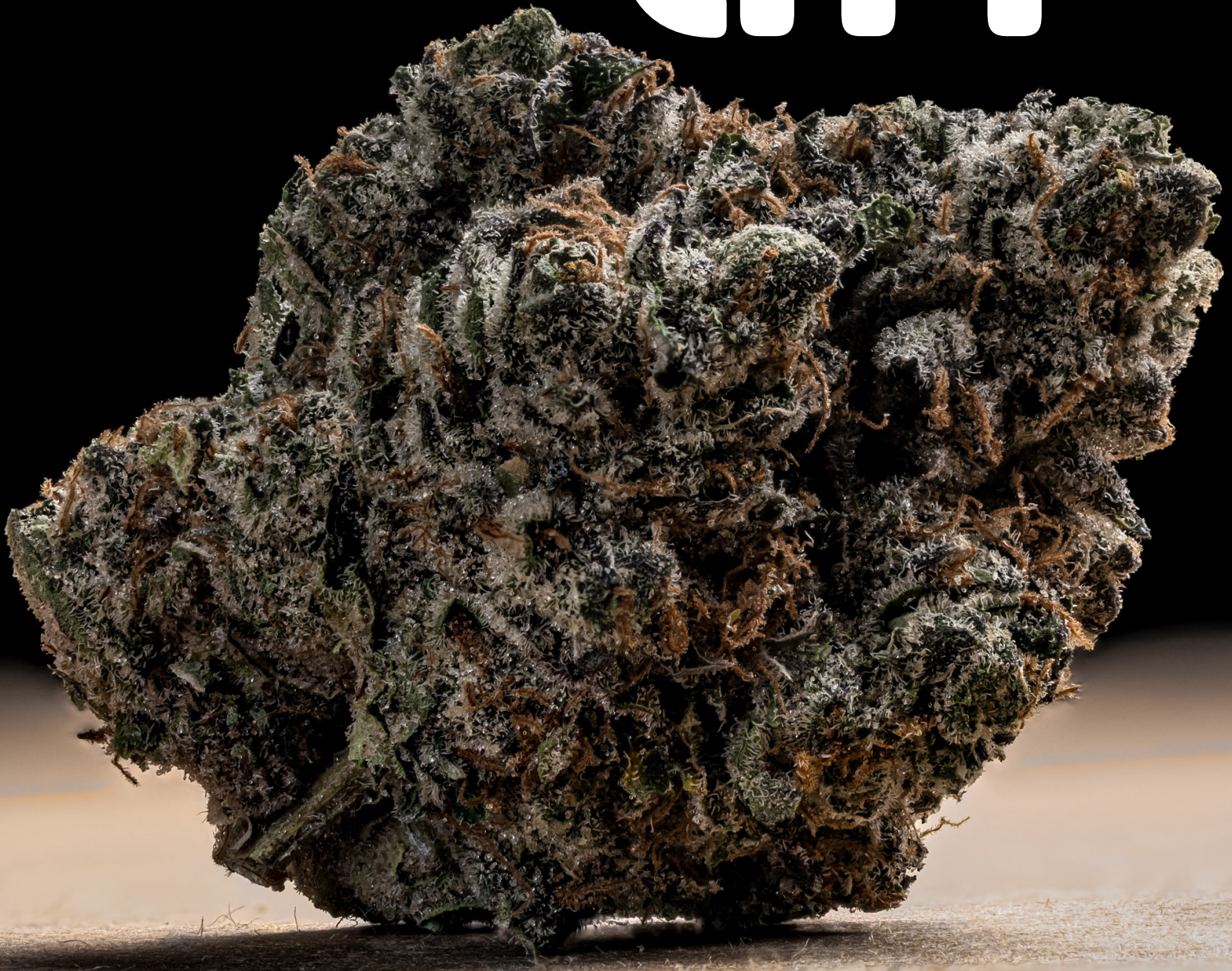


TAKE ME DOWN TO **CANNABIS** **CITY**

AN INSIDE LOOK AT VIRGINIA'S
MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION



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Six Do's + Don'ts For The Cannabis Curious

WORDS BY AMANDA WEISBROD

Marijuana possession and consumption laws are rapidly changing across the country, and it's no different in Virginia. The state has already seen a massive change in policy over the past year, and by 2024, recreational use will be fully legal. If you're new to the cannabis scene or are simply curious to learn more, this guide to possession, home cultivation, consumption and more is for you.

One: Take It Public

As long as you're 21 or older, you can possess up to one ounce of marijuana in public. This can be in the form of classic bud or the equivalent amount in other cannabis products like oils, concentrates, topicals, edibles, etc.

If you've got more than an ounce but less than a pound, you'll be charged with a \$25 fine — but possession of more than a pound of marijuana, or its cannabis product equivalent, is a felony punishable by one to 10 years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.

But this only applies when you're in public. There is no limit to how much marijuana you may possess at home — and this goes for home cultivation, too.

Two: Grow At Home

The law states that Virginia residents who are 21 and older may grow up to four cannabis plants at home. The plants can't be visible to the public (i.e., out on your front porch or next to a window) and must be inaccessible to people who are younger than 21 years of age.

If you decide to start cultivating your own cannabis, make sure you tag each of your plants with your name, driver's license or identification number and a note stating it's being grown for personal use.

Three: Hold Off On Sales

Unfortunately, recreational sales won't be legal until January 1, 2024 — but advocacy groups like the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) and Marijuana Justice are pushing legislators to move this date forward. This means unless you have a medical marijuana license (and you're 21+), you can't purchase cannabis products from a dispensary until recreational sales become legal.

But remember, as long as you're not in public and you're at least 21 years old, **recreational consumption is legal.**

Four: Visit A Dispensary

Medicinal use of cannabis has been legal in Virginia since spring 2020. There are currently four medical cannabis dispensaries open in the state: Dharma Pharmaceuticals in Abingdon, gLeaf in Richmond, BEYOND / HELLO in Manassas and Columbia Care in Portsmouth.

You can only buy cannabis products in the form of oils and edibles from medical dispensaries, but sales for cannabis in its flower form are expected to open in September.

To register for Virginia's medical cannabis program, you first have to obtain a valid written certification from a Board of Pharmacy-registered practitioner. Then, visit the Virginia Department of Health Professions (DHP) Initial Applications online to complete your application.

There is a fee of \$50 for patients and \$25 for parent/legal guardian or registered agent. Necessary documents include:

- A copy of the written certification issued by a registered practitioner
- Proof of residency of the qualifying patient and parent or

legal guardian, if applicable, such as a government-issued identification card or tax receipt

- Proof of identity and, if the patient is a minor, proof of identity of the parent or legal guardian in the form of a government-issued identification card
- Proof of age in the form of a birth certification or other government-issued identification

A valid Virginia driver's license will fulfill the requirements for proof of age, identity and residency, and a detailed walk-through of the registration process for the medical cannabis program is available at vanorml.org/register.

Five: Gift It Instead

Even though you can grow your own cannabis plants, it's still illegal to sell cannabis products — whether bud, oils or edibles. Instead, **you can gift them.**

Virginia's cannabis law states an adult over the age of 21 can gift up to one ounce of cannabis to another adult of age, but for no remuneration (or no payment, in layman's terms).

In D.C., which has a gifting statute similar to Virginia's, there is evidence some individuals and businesses have been exploiting this program by selling products, like merchandise or works of art, and including a free gift of cannabis with every purchase. This loophole has created an entire gray, or unregulated, market.

To solve this problem, lawmakers in Virginia added language to the bill to clarify what gifting marijuana means. The new provision states the legal gifting of marijuana does not include giving it away with purchased goods or services.

John McGowan, a managing member of cannabis-industry-focused law firm Kinner & McGowan, says cannabis consumers should take care to recognize the differences between gifting laws in Virginia and D.C.

"In D.C., the law allows up to one ounce of flower to be transferred for no value, but is silent on whether or not businesses can make these transfers," McGowan says. "In Virginia, there is no gray market. The law expressly disallows businesses from gifting in any capacity."

Six: Keep Things Local

While every state has its own legislation regarding cannabis, the use, sale or production of cannabis products with more than 0.3% concentration of THC is still illegal under federal law.

So, what does this mean for you?

McGowan says the federal vs. state issue with cannabis law is incredibly nuanced, but in short: Cannabis is federally illegal across the board.

"Certain states have chosen to legalize cannabis within their borders, however," McGowan says. "So, even if you buy state-legal weed, you are still technically breaking federal law. This means [people] cannot cross state lines with any amount or form of cannabis."


For more information, visit vanorml.org and marijuanajustice.org.

BEYOND / HELLO: 8100 Albertstone Cir. Manassas, VA; beyond-hello.com

Columbia Care: 4012 Seaboard Ct. Portsmouth, VA; col-care.com

Dharma Pharmaceuticals: 26864 Watauga Rd. Abingdon, VA; dharmacann.com

gLeaf: 2804 Decatur St. Building 30, Richmond, VA; gleaf.com

A portrait of Jenn Michelle Pedini, a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a light blue button-down shirt. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green outdoor setting.

WHO'S WHO IN THE VIRGINIA CANNABIS COMMUNITY

WORDS BY AMANDA WEISBROD

Cannabis legalization didn't happen overnight — it took an army of advocates, activists and politicians to push for change as Virginia was the first, and so far the only, Southern state to fully legalize cannabis. Meet a few of the most important members of the Virginia cannabis community: People who have spoken up and taken action to make legalization a reality.

JENN MICHELLE PEDINI Executive Director of Virginia NORML

As the development director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) and the executive director of NORML's Virginia chapter, Jenn Michelle Pedini was directly involved in legalizing cannabis, decriminalizing possession and establishing cannabis legislation oversight boards in Virginia.

Next, NORML's goal is to prioritize consumer safety as recreational sales open in 2024. They endeavor to establish a fair and equitable regulatory structure within the state.

"Like so many others, I came to this work out of necessity," Pedini says. "I've battled cancer twice and, presented with the reality I would likely face a third battle, I wanted to have every tool available."

They say during their treatments, many U.S. states granted legal access to cannabis — but Virginia wasn't one of them.

"I like to say I came for the healthcare and stayed for the criminal justice."

Learn more about Pedini and Virginia NORML's fight for marijuana rights at vanorml.org. Follow Virginia NORML on Instagram @virginia.norml.

CHELSEA HIGGS WISE Founder of Marijuana Justice

Chelsea Higgs Wise is as passionate as they come when it comes to marijuana justice and reform. As founder of the nonprofit Marijuana Justice, her top priority is a fair and just system, particularly for minorities who have suffered the most from the war on drugs.

Wise, who is also a clinical social worker, wants to think bigger when it comes to social equity in cannabis legislation. Within the context of cannabis law, social equity describes the process of implementing criminal justice reforms, promoting diversity in the industry, and reinvesting in communities that have been disproportionately affected by marijuana prohibition.

To Wise, social equity is more like a buzz term that has been framed as a business portion of the legislation. She says it should be more focused on people.

"What's most important to me is defunding the Virginia drug war, providing freedom to incarcerated people and providing expungements and direct payments to those impacted."

Follow Higgs Wise at chelseahiggswise.com and follow her on Instagram @chelseahiggswise. Learn more about the nonprofit Marijuana Justice at marijuanajustice.org or on Instagram @thcjusticenow.

Jenn Michelle Pedini. Photo courtesy of subject.

TAMARA NETZEL Board of Directors Secretary of Virginia NORML + Founder/Curator of Cruel Consequences: Portraits of Misguided Law

In 2013, Tamara Netzel was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She took medication until, four years later, her prescription caused liver failure. Then, she discovered CBD oil.

Netzel is the first to admit that before she tried CBD, she wasn't educated on cannabis. But once she realized this remedy relieved her chronic pain like nothing else, she sprang into action.

Netzel challenges misconceived notions on cannabis with her nonprofit portrait exhibit, "Cruel Consequences: Portraits of Misguided Law," which tells stories of those who have suffered under cannabis prohibition. She hopes more Virginians will open their minds toward cannabis consumption, and one day, cannabis will be treated like any other medicine.

"When you have been through a lot to fight an illness, you feel betrayed by the rest of the world already," Netzel says. "Then you encounter barriers to access safe medicine that helps you. I've been there and don't want anyone to feel they are shut out from something that can help them."

Learn more about Cruel Consequences: Portraits of Misguided Law at cruelconsequences.org and follow them on Instagram @cruelconsequences. Follow Netzel on Instagram @blondewndrwmn.

NGISTE ABEBE Vice President of Public Policy at Columbia Care + Board Member of the Cannabis Public Health Advisory Board

Ngiste Abebe began consuming cannabis to treat her insomnia and felt uncomfortable she could purchase it while people were still incarcerated for possession. In response, she joined the Virginia chapter of NORML.

Her NORML board membership led her to her position as vice president of public policy at Columbia Care, one of the largest cultivators, manufacturers and providers of medical and adult-use cannabis products in the United States. Although Abebe's focus shifted to the national level, she is still serving at the state level as board member of Virginia's Cannabis Public Health Advisory Board (CPHAB), which was established in July.

Through this position, Abebe hopes her perspective will help dispel misconceptions about cannabis and establish regulations to protect both patients and consumers.

"I strive to be a connector who makes complex policy actionable," she says. "People need to inform policy with their expertise and perspectives, and I hope to keep pulling more seats to the table so we can see cannabis make a difference."

Learn more about Abebe at vanorml.org/board.

ADAM EBBIN State Senator of Virginia's 30th District

In May 2020, after years of dedication and hard work, Senator Adam Ebbin passed SB2, which decriminalized simple marijuana possession in Virginia.

"The prohibition on cannabis at the state and federal level has clearly failed, and those failures have generational effects," Ebbin says. "[Effects which impact] access to safe medical cannabis, over-policing of Black and brown communities and the stigmatization of a comparatively safe alternative to addictive, dangerous intoxicants."



Senator Ebbin says consumer safety and public health are key components to cannabis policy.

“Just like anything else you put in your body, people need to know what they’re getting — whether that be appropriate dosage or actual product safety,” he says.

Learn more about Senator Ebbin at adamebbin.com and follow him on Instagram @adampebbin.

DAWN ADAMS
Delegate of Virginia’s 68th District

Delegate Dawn Adams, who has a background as a medical practitioner, says her experience in the medical field is invaluable in the context of legislative policy.

“It gives me a unique perspective on patient needs,” Adam says.

While she advocates for general adult use of cannabis, she wants to build a robust medical cannabis program to ensure it meets the needs of all patients.

“Marijuana law reform [helps] patients who are unable to be appropriately helped by pharmaceuticals,” she says.

“Cannabis prohibition is a failed government policy resulting in discriminatory law enforcement toward people of color — a waste of taxpayer dollars. It [has] criminalized a substance no more harmful than alcohol.”

Learn more about Delegate Adams at delegateadams.com and follow her on Instagram @deldawnadamsva.

JACK PAGE
Founder + Chief Executive Officer of Dharma Pharmaceuticals

Dharma Pharmaceuticals, a locally owned medicinal cannabis cultivator and dispensary, was the first processor in Virginia to open to the public in October 2020. Together with his husband and a longtime business associate, CEO Jack Page established Dharma to help patients cope with ailments with safe and accessible medicinal cannabis products.

This summer, Dharma was acquired by Green Thumb Industries and opened their second dispensary, RISE Salem, in Salem, Virginia. Page hopes with this expansion, Dharma can educate more people about the medicinal properties of cannabis and connect with those who may benefit.

“We believe that access to quality, regulated cannabis products is a right to wellness,” he says. “Many of our patients rely on high-quality products in order to manage pain, anxiety or to help with a good night’s sleep, and we are seeing more people turn to cannabis as an alternative to pain medicines and sleep aids.”

Learn more about Dharma Pharmaceuticals at darmacann.com.

JASON AMATUCCI
Founder of Virginia Hemp Coalition

In 2012, long time cannabis and hemp industry advocate Jason Amatucci established Virginia Hemp Coalition (VHC) to educate, inspire and rally Virginians to restore the free market for industrial hemp.

Amatucci has influenced several important pieces of legislation regarding hemp and cannabis rights, including the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills, as well as Virginia’s 2015 Industrial Hemp Law. Now hemp production is legal at both the federal level and the state level in Virginia, Amatucci is focused on

ensuring a free market for local hemp farmers and pushing for FDA regulation.

“Our goal from day one was to have hemp be treated as any other crop,” Amatucci says. “I think one day we’ll get there, but we have to keep educating people.”

Learn more about the Virginia Hemp Coalition at vahemp.org and follow them on Instagram at @virginiahempcoalition.

DAN PORTERFIELD
Account Manager at VCNaturalz

Before he worked at the minority-owned hemp company VCNaturalz, Dan Porterfield ran two vape shops — until he discovered CBD products were more effective than pain pills for his back injury.

It was then that he joined the VCNaturalz initiative, which aims to provide high-quality hemp cannabinoid products and offer the healthiest CBD treatments on the market. Porterfield says he enjoys working in cannabis more than the vape industry because he feels like he’s helping people heal.

He hopes for more regulation of cannabis and CBD products so consumers can stay safe and know what they’re putting into their bodies.

“Right now, there isn’t a regulation that requires lab reports — it’s more due diligence on the CBD company itself,” he says.

“That’s something we already do. Every product has a lab test and is completely visible to our customers.”

Learn more about VCNaturalz at vcnaturalz.com and follow them on Instagram @vcnaturalz.

ANTIONE HINES
President of Minorities for Medical Marijuana (M4MM) Virginia Chapter

After serving 10 years in the military, Antione Hines left with severe internal injuries, as did many of his fellow compatriots. The veteran says marijuana was the only relief for his pain — so he dedicated himself to fighting for the right to access medical marijuana.

Hines is currently the president of the Virginia chapter of Minorities for Medical Marijuana (M4MM), a nonprofit organization committed to cultivating an inclusive and diverse environment, while also serving as a resource for those who are interested in the world of cannabis.

As chapter president, Hines is focused on changing policies that put Black and brown people in jail; fighting for the expungement of records for those incarcerated due to marijuana-related offenses; and seeking to include social equity provisions to aid minorities who have been disproportionately affected by the war on drugs.

When recreational sales open in Virginia, he hopes marginalized folks can get in on the cannabis market.

“I hope to see Black and brown people owning and running dispensaries,” he says. “I hope to see hundreds of records expunged so people can partake in economic wealth opportunities. And I hope to see our historically Black colleges and universities given the opportunity to take part in research and education to close the wealth gap.”

Learn more about Minorities for Medical Marijuana at minorities4medicalmarijuana.org



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[PINKFOX202.COM](https://pinkfox202.com)



Will Virginia's — Towns + Counties — Opt Out of — Retail Weed?

WORDS BY GASPARD LE DEM

Weed shops are at Virginia's doorstep, but not everyone is rolling out the welcome mat.

As state regulators prepare to launch a legal cannabis market, local jurisdictions will have one chance to opt out of retail sales before they start in 2024. Under Virginia's new cannabis laws, localities will have a short window to hold public referendums on whether to allow recreational dispensaries within their boundaries.

The vote, to be decided by simple majority, can only take place after July 1, 2022 and must be certified before the end of 2022. The timeframe gives cannabis companies a chance to set up their businesses before the licensing process starts.

Experts say banning legal cannabis sales at the local level won't be easy and could come with significant downsides for localities — from missing out on new tax revenue to shoring up the existing illegal market.

To be clear, a "Yes" vote in a local referendum would only block retail sales — not override other new state law provisions. Legal possession and home cultivation will remain legal in every locality.

"It's literally nothing else — not medical, not cultivation, not manufacturing, not possession, not wholesale," says Jenn Michelle Pedini, development director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

Pedini, who also serves as executive director of the state affiliate Virginia NORML, says state laws on banning retail sales are highly specific. Laws even prescribe language to use in a referendum, which prevents localities from posing questions in a way that could skew the vote.

"It's entirely prescribed by legislation," Pedini says.

Section § 4.1-629 of the Virginia code says the referendum question must be: "Shall the operation of retail marijuana stores be prohibited in [name of locality]?"

It's hard to predict exactly how many counties, cities or towns will turn down retail sales, but polling indicates bans will probably be more of an exception than a rule. Before legalization passed, a poll by Christopher Newport University found 69% of Virginians were in favor of it, though respondents expressed different degrees of support.

However, in a survey of local officials by government watchdog Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), one-third of respondents were unable to say whether their jurisdictions would ban retail sales.

"Generally, local officials in the state's populous Northern Virginia region indicated their localities would probably allow commercial marijuana," JLARC reported in a recent survey. "Rural localities in the Southwestern and Southern Virginia regions generally responded they would probably prohibit it."

JLARC also found opinions on pot vary sharply within regions themselves, with some counties wanting to prohibit retail pot while large cities within them wanting to allow it. Some officials — mostly in conservative, majority-white jurisdictions — have griped about legalization in public hearings, spreading what experts say are unfounded fears that a regulated cannabis market will lead to a surge in crime.

In May, some Democrats on the executive board of Loudoun County — a once rural jurisdiction that is now a sprawling business hub — expressed concerns about taxing recreational cannabis, framing the issue as a question of ethics.

"Legalizing marijuana is done for one reason, and one reason only: to get tax money," Loudoun County Chair Phyllis Randall says. "I do not believe we should be getting tax money from an addictive substance."

The same month in King George County, where 59% voted for Donald Trump in 2020, chair of the county's board of supervisors Annie Cupka directed the county attorney to find ways to keep cannabis illegal — despite legalization. Pedini cautioned that elected officials' views don't always reflect what constituents want.

"One city councilperson's opinion about the location of retail dispensaries doesn't determine their location," Pedini says, adding that NORML regularly receives inquiries from residents concerned their leaders will block retail cannabis.

Banning cannabis sales could be self-defeating financially. Localities that opt out won't see a cent of the \$230 million in annual tax dollars that Virginia's legal pot market is expected to generate within five years of launching.

"[If] you walk out, you do not get any funding," Pedini says. The new legislation even gives localities an option to raise taxes an additional 3% on top of other local cannabis taxes. And while the link between legal pot and violent crime has become a standard talking point for anti-cannabis pundits, there's little evidence the two are connected. A 2019 study published by the National Institute of Justice found crime rates didn't budge after Colorado and Washington state passed laws to legalize the drug.

"There were no statistically significant long-term effects of recreational cannabis laws, or the initiation of retail sales on violent or property crime rates in these states," the researchers write.

On the contrary, experts worry banning legal sales could shore up the illicit cannabis market, incentivizing dealers to purchase pot in one jurisdiction — only to sell at a higher price where retail sales are banned.

"Localities that enacted prohibitions would likely continue to have illegal markets operating in their jurisdictions," JLARC reports. "Illegal markets could grow even larger following legalization."

Research indicates harsh drug laws in Virginia have done little to stem the commonwealth's illegal cannabis trade. According to New Frontier Data, Virginia's market for illegal pot was worth \$1.8 billion in 2020, making it the fourth largest in the nation.

"Legalization does not bring cannabis to Virginia," Pedini says. "It's already here, and it's widespread."

But that hasn't stopped some politicians, like GOP gubernatorial candidate Glenn Youngkin, from drumming up fear and doubt about legalization. The businessman, a political neophyte who has never run for public office, earned three Pinocchios from The Washington Post for claims that states with legalized retail sales have seen disappointing tax revenue.

"Do not count on the revenue from legalized marijuana to amount to anything," Youngkin said at a public forum in February. "It hasn't worked in Colorado, it hasn't worked in California, it hasn't worked in Oregon. This has been a false advertisement."

Pedini says politicians should keep facts in mind when considering legalization.

"I think it's really a lack of understanding of the policy principles behind legalization that leads to these knee jerk reactions," he says.

Regardless, the decision on whether to ban retail sales isn't up to politicians.

"It's up to the voter," Pedini says.

For more information, visit norml.org and vanorml.org.

But What About Hemp?

WORDS BY AMANDA WEISBROD

Virginia's hemp industry boomed after the crop became legal in 2018, but what does its future look like as recreational marijuana production is right around the corner?

Let's get something straight here — hemp is not marijuana, and marijuana is not hemp. But they are both the same species, namely *cannabis sativa*. So, what's the difference?

Scientifically, there really isn't one, but it's a different story in the legal realm. Hemp is classified by federal law as a variety of cannabis that contains less than 0.3% of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the chemical that causes the "high" when cannabis is consumed. Meanwhile, marijuana contains a higher concentration of THC.

Their uses are different, too. Marijuana is mainly produced for medical and recreational use, while hemp is treated more like an industrial crop. In fact, hemp has so many uses it's impossible to name them all. Some of the most common ways the crop enters the consumer market are via health foods, organic body care, textiles, construction materials, biofuels and plastic composites.

With hemp's great versatility, many advocates have been pushing for the crop's legalization for years. Hemp production in the U.S. was initially restricted in 1937 by the Marijuana Tax Act, and later completely outlawed as a Schedule I drug in the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 during the war on drugs.

Jason Amatucci, founder of hemp rights advocacy group Virginia Hemp Coalition (VHC) established in 2012, has been fighting for the right to grow hemp since his college days in the '90s.

"It was ridiculous [that the government was] trying to ban all sorts of hemp during the drug war and reefer madness," Amatucci says. "I always supported hemp, but it seemed like whatever we did, we couldn't get any traction for legalization."

The hemp industry began to open up when President Obama signed the 2014 Farm Bill into law, establishing a hemp-growing pilot program. State departments of agriculture and universities were officially permitted to produce hemp, but for research purposes only.

Then, in 2018, President Trump signed a second farm bill that legalized hemp production at the federal level. Amatucci had a hand in both pieces of legislation, and says it was a privilege and honor to help the cause.

"We didn't have a whole lot of help, but our grassroots coalition had a lot of great volunteers. We spent a lot of time in general assemblies, lobbying and educating."

Although hemp production was legalized at the federal level, states are still responsible for deciding their own laws regarding cannabis production. In Virginia, the 2015 Virginia Industrial Hemp Law allowed licensed growers who were part of a university-managed research program to cultivate industrial hemp. Amatucci, who also worked to pass the bill, says the Hemp Law "broke the dam wide open" for progression of the hemp industry.



Photo courtesy of Flower for the People.



But it wasn't until July 1 of this year that hemp production was fully legalized in the state. Now, anyone who hasn't been convicted of a drug felony in the last 10 years can sign up for a license through the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), which oversees Virginia's hemp industry in an official capacity.

As of July 31, there are 876 registered industrial hemp growers, 290 registered industrial hemp processors and 135 registered industrial hemp dealers in the state of Virginia, according to data obtained from VDACS.

Erin Williams, who serves as the industrial hemp program manager at VDACS, says that prior to the 2014 Farm Bill, the industrial hemp conversation was fixated on fiber and grain varieties. Now, she says the focus has shifted to the floral variety that Virginia hemp farmers grow.

These floral strains are mainly used in the production of cannabinoid (CBD) products, which come in all sorts of forms including gummies, oils and salves. Although the FDA has yet to approve them, CBD products are fully legal. CBD is often consumed to relieve a variety of medical conditions or symptoms including anxiety and chronic pain.

Dan Porterfield, the account manager of VCNaturalz, a hemp farm and CBD producer based in the Shenandoah Valley, says he hopes the FDA recognizes and regulates CBD products so consumers know exactly what they're buying.

"Right now, there isn't a regulation that requires lab reports — it's more due diligence on the CBD company itself," he says. "That's something we already do. Every product we have has a lab test and everything is completely visible to our customers."

Flower for the People, another Virginia-based hemp farm and hemp-product vendor, also sells CBD products. Owner Jason Blanchette says once Virginia's recreational marijuana sales open in 2024, he's planning to pivot toward growing cannabis with a

higher concentration of THC. He believes other industrial hemp producers will do the same.

"I'm not sure how sustainable it is having a ton of hemp growers in Virginia who just want to grow hemp," he says. "My gut tells me a lot of hemp growers got into [hemp cultivation] like we did, knowing it would be a soft transition into cannabis."

As for the future of hemp, Amatucci says the state — and the nation — has a long way to go. Even though hemp production is legalized now, the hemp advocate says the VHC has a slew of challenges to face, such as the threat of monopolization by pharmaceutical companies.

"Our goal from day one was to have hemp treated as any other crop," he says. "It doesn't need any special regulation, guidance or oversight. I think one day we'll get there, but we have to keep educating people."

The future of the hemp industry is uncertain, but Williams says to look to other states who have both legalized hemp and marijuana production to see Virginia's potential future.

"Colorado has the largest hemp program in the U.S.," she says. "These industries can coexist and be successful. I don't see any reason why Virginia would be any different."

To learn more about Virginia's current hemp production laws or to register to become a grower, visit the VDACS website at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/plant-industry-services-hemp.shtml.

Flower for the People: flowerforthepeeps.com // [@flowerforthepeeps](https://twitter.com/flowerforthepeeps)

VCNaturalz: vcnaturalz.com // [@vcnaturalz](https://twitter.com/vcnaturalz)

Virginia Hemp Coalition: vahemp.org // [@virginiahempcoalition](https://twitter.com/virginiahempcoalition)

THIRD PAGE. Flower for the People's Evan Walsh. Photo courtesy of subject.



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IN RICHMOND, A NEW POT NURSERY TEACHES PEOPLE TO GROW THEIR OWN MEDICINE

WORDS BY GASPARD LE DEM



About 20 years ago in Temecula, California, Joe Vega stepped out into his parent's backyard to plant his first cannabis seed. It was the early aughts, and Vega was still in high school. The fear of pot loomed large and growing the plant was illegal in every U.S. state. But Vega's parents were out of town that day, and his grandma was the only adult in charge.

"Nobody ever noticed," he says.

Vega kept casually growing pot as an adult, picking up new techniques from fellow cultivators as he moved from one city to the next, eventually settling down in Richmond, Virginia. He never really considered growing weed could be more than just a backyard hobby until two years ago, after attending a cannabis

trade show in Michigan.

"We should do this," he remembers thinking.

Then, Virginia passed sweeping new cannabis legislation that, along with legalizing possession and recreational sales, authorized adults to grow up to four plants per household. So on July 1 — the day the new laws went into effect — Vega and his business partner, Patrick Hilleary, opened up HomeGrown VA, a new gardening center in Richmond that specializes in cannabis cultivation.

"We realized with legalization — especially with Covid-19 — a lot of people became interested in growing their own medicine," he says. "We wanted to help facilitate that."

Located just outside Richmond's trendy Scott's Addition neighborhood, the store boasts more than 2,000 square feet of retail space where pot enthusiasts can find all the tools and supplies needed to start growing at home. This includes soil, fertilizer, nutrients, harvesting tools and high-powered lights for indoor cultivation, among other items.

Hilleary says growing pot isn't necessarily complicated — it's called weed for a reason. For growers who want to get technical, though, the sky's the limit.

"I would say it's as easy or as hard as you want to make it," he says.

According to Vega, growing outside usually means less maintenance.

"Outdoors you'll get a lot of hardier plants, just because the sun and the wind can't be replicated," Vega says.

Growing in an indoor environment, however, tends to require more equipment and a higher level of precision, requiring controlled temperature, humidity and vapor pressure. And while most soils will work, it's always best to use something rich in organic matter.

HomeGrown VA sells products like Sloppy Bunz, a top soil made from rabbit droppings, worm excrement, fermented alfalfa leaves, bacteria and coconut fiber. To the average gardener, that mix might not sound very appealing. Vega, on the other hand, gets a real kick out of the ingredients.

"Basically, it's a bunch of fungus and bacteria and we got ourselves a party," he says.

HomeGrown VA isn't Virginia's only grow shop, though it's among the first to openly market itself as a cannabis business. Before legalization, strict cannabis laws forced weed nurseries to hide behind names like "hydroponic shop" to avoid legal woes.

Hilleary says it's time for the era of taboos to end, which is why he and Vega picked a logo for HomeGrown that prominently features a cannabis leaf.

"It's completely legal and we're not going to hide behind it," he says. "If we're going to do this, let's be open about what we're doing."

But being forthcoming hasn't been without consequences.

Despite legalization, Vega and Hilleary have repeatedly run into issues with companies who refuse to work with cannabis businesses. They've been declined services by credit card companies, online marketplaces and even social media platforms like Facebook, which blocked HomeGrown from creating a business profile.

"We can't run any kind of ads or promotion, we can't promote anything that we do," Vega says.

Then there's the issue of seeds.

Under Virginia's new laws, recreational cannabis sale — which includes seeds and clones — won't be authorized until 2024.

For a cannabis nursery, it's an elephant in the room: How can customers grow pot if they can't buy seeds or seedlings?

Vega says she doesn't plan on selling seeds until it's 100% legal. In the meantime, HomeGrown regularly hosts seed giveaways and swaps where experienced cultivators trade goods. Even gifting seeds can get dicey, though.

Sharing and gifting cannabis became legal on July 1, but the new laws stipulate no gift can be tied to a separate transaction or advertised parallel with another sale. The provisions are meant to prevent loopholes that could lead to a gifting economy, like in D.C. For Vega, the restrictions on seeds are frustrating and unwarranted. As far as he's concerned, the restrictions only perpetuate the stigma against cannabis businesses.

"It's the idea that [cannabis is] something different — but it's just a plant," he says. "It's a tomato, it's a pumpkin, it's a cucumber, it's a sunflower. There's no difference between us and the garden center at Lowe's."

Learn more about HomeGrown VA at homegrown-va.com and follow them on Instagram @homegrown_va.

(L to R) Peter Hilleary, Natalie McFarland + Joe Vega pose outside HomeGrown for the cannabis nursery's grand opening on July 1, 2021 in Richmond, Virginia.

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A Political SHAKE-UP

Could Impact the Future of Pot Legalization in Virginia

WORDS BY GASPARD LE DEM

Virginia took a big leap toward cannabis reform last spring by passing legislation that authorized pot possession and home cultivation. The law also laid the groundwork for retail sales to begin in 2024.

It was a major victory for cannabis advocates: The commonwealth has a long history of enforcing some of the toughest drug policies in the nation. Until this year, getting arrested with as little as a joint in Virginia could land someone in jail for an entire year.

The reforms reflect a shift in the state's political identity over the last decade, from a swing state to a solid Democratic stronghold. That shift culminated in state Democrats securing a government trifecta in 2020, allowing politicians to pass a slew of progressive measures — from abolishing the death penalty, to restoring voting rights for convicted felons.

But the trifecta could now be hanging in the balance, along with the future of cannabis legalization.

In November, Virginia voters will head to the polls to pick a new governor and a fresh roster of representatives for the General Assembly's House of Delegates. Experts say a shake-up in the commonwealth's political leadership could jeopardize the legalization process — theoretically, at least.

In the governor's race, former Governor Terry McAuliffe, an establishment Democrat who is running for the same seat he held from 2014 to 2018, is vying against Republican Glenn Youngkin, a private equity executive and self-described political outsider who has never held public office.

The two candidates have so far expressed diametrically opposed views on cannabis legalization.

McAuliffe, who is considered the frontrunner, has positioned himself as staunchly pro-cannabis, framing legalization as a question of civil rights and warning voters his opponent could seek to undo reforms.

"The vast majority of Virginians support legal cannabis, but extreme Republicans are determined to make it illegal again," McAuliffe said on July 1 in a thinly veiled tweet about Youngkin.

Youngkin tried to dispel McAuliffe's accusations: "False," his campaign responded to the tweet. "Glenn Youngkin will not seek to repeal [legalization]."

But previous comments have undermined his credibility. Just weeks after the new laws passed, Youngkin told CNBC legalization was a "mess" he would "clean up as governor." The comments sparked a backlash and Youngkin has since treaded carefully on the issue of legalization, avoiding comments that could turn off pro-cannabis voters. (Last year, 68% of Virginians supported legalization.)

Miles Coleman, an analyst at the University of Virginia's

Center for Politics, says Youngkin tip-toeing around the issue doesn't guarantee he won't attack legalization if elected.

"If I were a cannabis advocate, I'd be a little worried if the Republicans take governorship and the legislature," Coleman says. "But I think that's an uphill race in both cases."

According to an August survey by Christopher Newport University, McAuliffe holds a nine-point lead on Youngkin among likely voters. However, some polls suggest a much closer race: Virginia Commonwealth University found the candidates were locked "in a virtual dead heat" that same month, with Youngkin trailing by just 3%.

Coleman says cannabis legalization is one of many reforms Virginia's increasingly progressive electorate has come to embrace. Still, the full-fledged endorsement of legal cannabis by some political candidates is surprising.

"Historically, you wouldn't have a mainstream candidate for either party come out for marijuana legalization as forcefully as McAuliffe," Coleman says.

Jenn Pedini, executive director of the Virginia chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), says the start of commercial cannabis sales in 2024 will depend entirely on the General Assembly reenacting provisions of the law next year.

That means if Youngkin wins in November, he could decide to block the passage of some regulatory provisions on cannabis, delaying the launch of recreational sales.

"He can veto and offer amendments," Pedini says.

A full repeal of legal pot possession by Republicans would be more difficult, Pedini says, though not impossible. It would require a simple majority vote from the state legislature.

In August, Speaker of the House Eileen Filler-Corn told Virginia Scope she believes Republicans will try to repeal legalization if they are in a position to do so. Her hypothesis isn't far-fetched considering the entire GOP House Caucus voted against legalization in April, with Democrats passing the bill by a 54 vote.

Legalization won narrowly in the Senate, too, with Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax, a Democrat, breaking a 20-20 tie on the bill. Fairfax is now up for reelection in November, along with state Attorney General Mark Herring, who is also a Democrat.

Pedini says Virginia's new cannabis laws are still fragile, and advocates should be prepared for anything to happen if Democrats lose the upper hand in November.

"Everything is always up for debate," Pedini says. "It will make it very difficult to advance meaningful [cannabis] legislation without a Democratic majority in the House."

For more information, visit vanorml.org.

Photo courtesy of LoCo Hemp.

HOW WILL VIRGINIA TAX LEGAL CANNABIS + FIX DECADES OF HARMFUL DRUG POLICIES?

WORDS BY GASPARD LE DEM

Janice Underwood knows what it's like to be on the front lines. In 2019, she was appointed by Governor Ralph Northam as Virginia's first chief diversity officer to serve in a cabinet-level position. Since then, she's worked to slowly dismantle the commonwealth's ingrained history of racial inequity through One Virginia, a new initiative to increase diversity within the ranks of state government.

Most recently, after Virginia became the first Southern state to legalize recreational cannabis, Underwood was tapped to chair the Cannabis Equity Reinvestment Board (CERB), a first-of-a-kind program that will use tax revenue generated by legal weed sales to shore up communities historically harmed by harsh drug policies.

In this exclusive interview, we asked Underwood to break down the mechanics of cannabis reinvestments, whether the CERB's work is a form of reparations, and how the upcoming gubernatorial race could slow Virginia's roll toward cannabis equity.

District Fray: How is the CERB preparing for the launch of legal cannabis sales in Virginia?

Janice Underwood: The governor ordered us to begin and end this process with equity in mind. Other states have approached legalizing cannabis sales from the perspective of public health, public safety and agriculture. We want to add an equity perspective by involving the governor's brand-new office of equity, diversity and inclusion. CERB's purpose is to directly address the impact of economic disinvestment, violence and the historical overuse of criminal justice responses to certain communities and individuals. We want to set up the board for success once tax revenue from cannabis sales actually starts flowing into the economy.

What happens when tax revenue starts rolling in? How will the CERB redistribute it?

Virginia's new law dedicates 30% of taxes collected from cannabis businesses to the [CERB]. The CERB is responsible for managing that fund. Right now, we are still at the beginning

of that process. As chair of the CERB, my office is setting up the processes and policies that will govern the board. Once those are established, I will provide recommendations to the board to address the impact of economic disinvestment, violence and the overuse of criminal justice responses on communities and individuals.

Can you give me an example of how CERB could reinvest money from its fund?

Right now, there's no money in the reinvestment fund's portfolio and we don't expect to have any until about 2023. The specific institutions and organizations CERB will support are outlined in the Virginia code. For example, CERB will create scholarship programs and educational resources to support people in foster care and those who suffer from substance abuse. We also want to support workforce development programs, mentoring programs, job training, placement services, apprenticeships and reentry services.

What else are you considering for the fund?

Before we can launch a scholarship, for example, the board will need to determine an application process. Also, how will we inform people across the state about the scholarship so they know it exists? What will be the criteria for eligibility? Finally, who will be awarded the scholarship and on what grounds? There will be far more need than money to start with, so these questions are really important.

How will you involve the community in the reinvestment process?

I don't think we will be successful as a commonwealth if we don't keep a One Virginia mindset. We welcome community advocates, leaders and policymakers to the open board meetings. We want to build a coalition of allies in this work. But we can't do it without the community, and we won't do it without the community. Also, all the minutes and the work we're doing will be posted on our website after each public reading, so people can track the work of the CERB.

In March, Evanston, Illinois became the first U.S. city to launch a reparations program for Black residents. Do you see CERB's work as a form of reparations?

For far too long, communities of color and low-wealth communities have been criminalized and unfairly incarcerated because of the sale of marijuana. We are showing a tangible — not theoretical — investment in diversity, equity and inclusion. [Equity principles] will also be good for communities harmed by white supremacy and will help advance real marijuana justice. Let me be clear, though: We have a long way to go and I'm not wearing rose-colored glasses. My concern is getting help to those who need it, as opposed to engaging in a political back-and-forth on whether or not we should use the word reparations.

The Virginia gubernatorial and House of Delegates election is coming up in November. Are you concerned a change in political leadership could work against the CERB?

Virginia elects a different governor every four years, but the legalization of marijuana is actually a bipartisan issue. There are people on both sides who are advancing this work across the nation. I recognize the possibility that adverse sentiments could inhibit the work of CERB, but our mandate is to invest back into the community. I hope whoever the 74th governor is — hopefully Terry McAuliffe — supports our endeavors and other programs that benefit the commonwealth's constituents.

Many advocates say it's unfair some Virginians are still serving time in prison for cannabis crimes when the substance is now legal. What are your thoughts?

I agree too many are still serving time in prison, but we have to have realistic expectations for [new] processes to take hold. It's easy to yell and say we want to do it, but doing the work is hard. I want to make sure our efforts are sustainable. I welcome input from activists, community leaders and legislators on what cannabis justice should look like. Let's all work toward that goal, as opposed to



working in silos and attacking each other. I may be the commonwealth's chief diversity officer, but in my heart I'm an educator. I'm an activist, and I'm working toward inclusive excellence.

I don't mean this as a gotcha question, but do you use cannabis?

Cannabis has existed on this planet since the beginning of time, so I don't know why anyone would view that as a gotcha question. We have been socialized to view cannabis as an illegal substance associated with criminals, which is a complete farce. In the '80s, there were politicians who criminalized cannabis and intentionally associated it [with] the Black community. My goal is to figure out equitable ways to reinvest cannabis revenue in our Virginia communities, so we can change the harmful narrative that has been perpetuated for generations.

As Virginia's first chief diversity officer, what do you want to be known for?

I want people to know I'm a servant leader and I believe wholeheartedly in diversity, equity and inclusion. It's not always easy to operate from a diversity and equity lens inside state government. My background as an educator, activist, mother, daughter and wife — even as a caregiver to my father — gives me a comprehensive view service. It allows me to understand the nexus between diversity and equity and state government, and how to apply that to the cannabis industry. It's complicated and nuanced work, but we're rolling up our sleeves and doing it.

Learn more about Underwood and her role as Virginia's chief diversity officer at governor.virginia.gov/diversity/about-us.

so, you wanna break into the cannabis industry?

WORDS + GRAPHIC BY AMANDA WEISBROD

It's not as intimidating as it sounds — all it takes is a little research and dash of determination. Just like any other industry, what matters most is your passion for the product and drive to get things done. If you really want to break into the

cannabis industry, you can do it — just like so many people before you. To get a head start, follow our four tips below based on a blog post by cannabis industry research and networking site, vangst.com.



DO YOUR RESEARCH.

Learning everything you can about the industry will show any employer you're serious and ready to jump in. Some important points to keep in mind are cannabis legislation and legalization at the state level, as well as commonly used terms in the cannabis industry vernacular. Break out the flash cards and get to studying.



NETWORKING MATTERS.

Like getting hired in any industry that's built on the foundation of close relationships, the cannabis industry relies heavily on who you know and how you know them. Luckily, its fast-growing nature means more people are jumping into this area of work now more than ever. Don't be afraid to extend that olive branch and make new friends.



BUT EXPERIENCE DOESN'T.

Having past experience in the cannabis industry on your resume isn't nearly as important as showing the passion and drive you have for this kind of work to your potential employer. And remember, this industry has only been around for about a decade, so odds are the person sitting across from you in that interview is pretty new to this whole deal, too.



KEEP YOURSELF UP-TO-DATE.

In an industry that changes more than a chameleon in a patterned fabric store, it's important to stay up-to-date on the latest cannabis insights, trends and happenings. Signing up for newsletters and setting social media notifications for your favorite cannabis companies and brands are great ways to stay in the loop.

frequently asked questions

Do I need to be a consumer to work with cannabis?

Nope. In fact, plenty of people who work with cannabis don't partake. As long as you are passionate about the product and understand the nuances of the cannabis industry, (this is where research comes in handy), you're well on your way to finding a job in the cannabis realm.

What are the differences between working in cannabis versus another industry?

While many traditional industries have been established for quite some time, the cannabis industry is fairly new, so it's rapidly growing and constantly changing. That being said, it's also very laid-back (experts say you don't want to walk into an interview wearing a suit and tie). Oh, and interpersonal relationships are key (helloooo, networking).

What kind of skills are employers looking for?

It depends on the type of job you're applying to, but there are certain skills that apply to most cannabis careers: experience working within a regulated industry, sales and retail know-how, the ability to self-teach, aptitude for working in a team-environment, and flexibility due to the industry's fast-paced and ever-changing nature.

How do I find companies that are hiring near me?

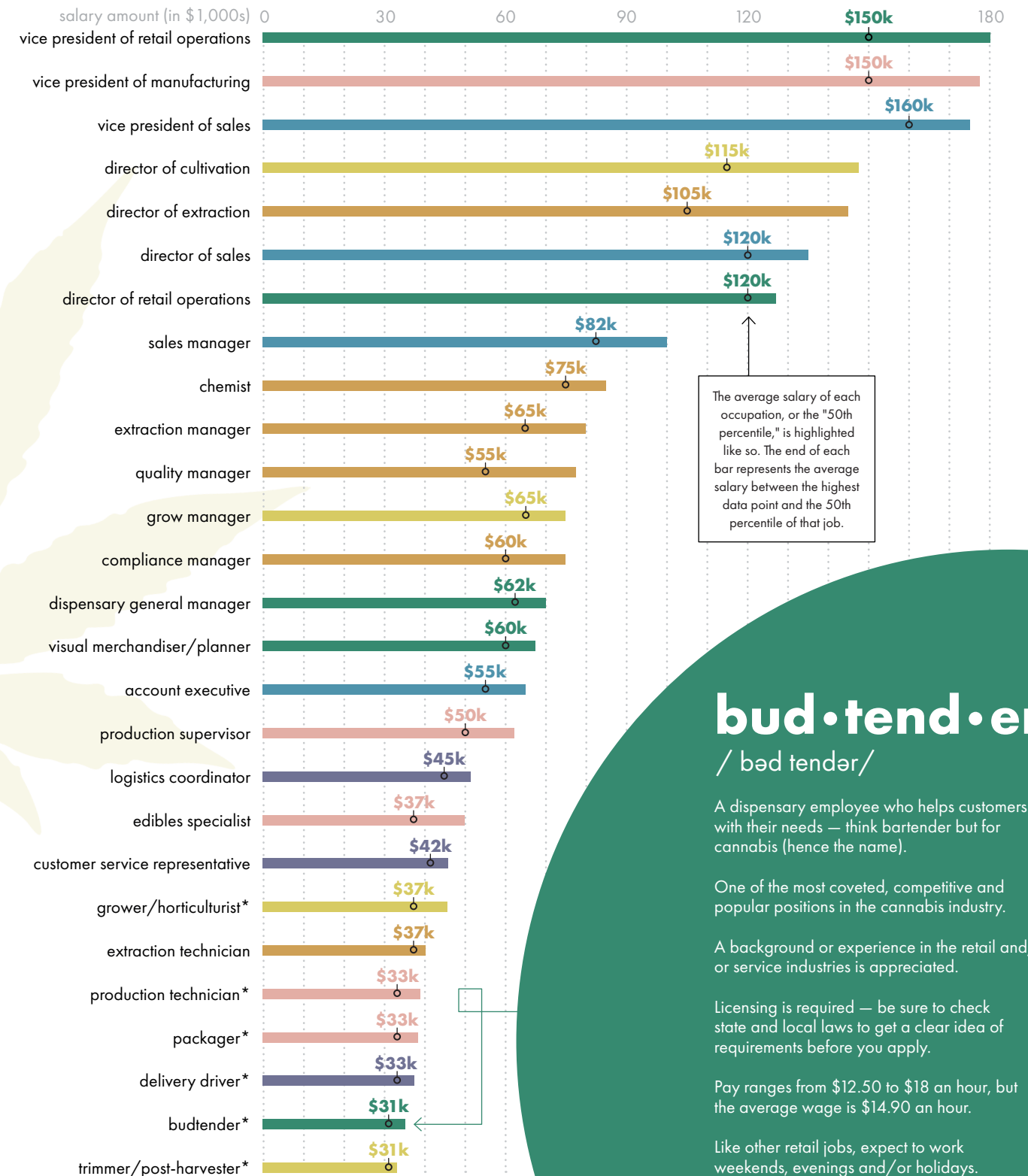
First, curate a list of the top five cannabis companies you'd like to work for and do your research on their work culture and mission. Reach out to the recruiters of your top five via cannabis-focused networking websites. It's always a good idea to go into this process with an idea of what realm(s) you'd like to work in so you can discuss it with the recruiters. Even if you don't land a job now, they might think of you in the future.

but, how well does it pay?

RETAIL • CULTIVATION • LAB/EXTRACTION • MANUFACTURING • SALES • DELIVERY

Just like any other industry, careers in cannabis vary widely — and so does the pay. A 2020 report by Vangst, a cannabis-centered hiring site, outlines six sectors of the cannabis industry:

retail, cultivation, lab/extraction, manufacturing, sales and delivery. The report includes salaries for several occupations within each sector, which are visualized by the bars below.



The average salary of each occupation, or the "50th percentile," is highlighted like so. The end of each bar represents the average salary between the highest data point and the 50th percentile of that job.

bud•tend•er

/ bəd tender/

A dispensary employee who helps customers with their needs — think bartender but for cannabis (hence the name).

One of the most coveted, competitive and popular positions in the cannabis industry.

A background or experience in the retail and/or service industries is appreciated.

Licensing is required — be sure to check state and local laws to get a clear idea of requirements before you apply.

Pay ranges from \$12.50 to \$18 an hour, but the average wage is \$14.90 an hour.

Like other retail jobs, expect to work weekends, evenings and/or holidays.



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