

YOLO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES – CANNABIS UNIT

OVERVIEW: In 2016, Yolo County was tasked with establishing a regulatory and enforcement program for the cultivation of commercial cannabis in the County's unincorporated areas. By recruiting experienced staff and developing new and innovative templates and forms, Yolo County's cannabis program became a statewide trailblazer.

CHALLENGE: In October 2015, California passed a set of laws regulating medical marijuana use for commercial cannabis activity. The bulk of the laws came in three bills, SB 643, AB243, and AB 266, known collectively as the Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act (MMRSA). As a result, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors adopted Ordinance Number 1467 in March 2016, that allowed commercial cultivation of cannabis up to one acre of garden canopy. After initially being managed by the County's Agriculture and Weights & Measures Department, the program was transferred to the Department of Community Services in 2018 to be managed by the Environmental Health Division in 2020.

The State's CalCannabis Department adopted a Track and Trace system (METRC) to track commercial cannabis activity and movement to prevent diversion of legally grown cannabis product into the illegal market. This system uses a "Unique Identifier" (UID) to reference a specific plant on a licensed premises and any cannabis or cannabis product derived or manufactured from that plant. Licensed Cannabis Operators are required to affix UID tags to all cannabis product onsite, ranging from seeds, immature plants, flowering plants, harvested plants, plant waste, and unfinished and finished product. A typical one acre farm can have between 2,000-60,000 UID tags. Yolo County Cannabis staff needed a comprehensive program and tools to navigate the new state laws, METRC system, local ordinance and regulations (that included monthly on-site field inspections) all while building relationships with cannabis farmers and educating them on the brand new protocols.

SOLUTION: In April 2019, the Yolo County Cannabis Unit developed an electronic checklist-style inspection form that was easy to use on tablets. No other county in the State had this style and ease of inspection form that allowed inspectors to write up an inspection report that was consistent, clear, and easy to download. The use of templated comments also provided clear references back to the Yolo County Code of Ordinances and direction for returning non-compliant issues back to compliance.

In addition, Yolo County created another revolutionary template. In August 2019, the Yolo County Cannabis Unit gained access to METRC for each licensed cultivator. This provided the team the necessary knowledge of what each licensed cultivator had on their premises with respect to total

cannabis inventory. With access to this real-time data, the Cannabis Unit developed a “Metrc Summary Report Template” utilizing Excel macros and formulas to summarize the total inventory into a easily readable summary as well as enabled field inspectors the ability to scan UID tags in the field to cross reference whether the tags are active and authentic. The template also provided inspectors the knowledge on specific details linked to each UID tag, specifically the strain of the plant, the room for which the plant belongs to and the count/weight of the plant/product. Having the ability to audit each cultivation site with real-time data has enabled the Yolo County Cannabis Unit a higher level of oversight for each operator and kept them accountable for maintaining the proper flow of cannabis inventory.

INNOVATION: The introduction of an electronic inspection form has resulted in improved staff efficiency, uniformity in how inspections are conducted, and transparency for the cultivators since they are now aware of what is expected during a field inspection. In addition, this new inspection form has now been shared with multiple counties to help improve their own programs and inspections.

The development of the “Metrc Summary Report Template” has enable staff the ability to quickly export Metrc data, push a button to enable the macros, and produce an easily readable summary report. In addition, on-site auditing of inventory was only made possible with the use of a barcode scanner and the “Metrc Summary Report Template”. Not only are Cannabis Unit staff utilizing the template but our cultivators were also provided the template to help maintain their inventory as well as perform internal audits. These innovations have led to deeper collaborations with counties throughout the state as well as continued partnership with the State of California.

RESULTS: With these two developments, the average cannabis inspection has gone from 3-5 hours per site to 1-2 hours per site. Also, cannabis cultivators have become more compliant and forthcoming with on-site activities and cannabis inventory. California Department of Food and Agriculture CalCannabis staff have stated Yolo County has the best cannabis inspection and enforcement program in the state.

REPLICABILITY: Yolo County’s Cannabis electronic inspection form has been shared amongst other counties throughout California. In addition, the “Metrc Summary Report Template” does not require any special formatting and can be used by anyone who has access to the Metrc database. This template has been demonstrated to the Central Coast Cannabis Forum and CalCannabis and both have shown interest in adopting the use of the template and/or reaching out to Yolo County to help develop a similar tool.

PROJECT OR PROGRAM CONTACT: Hoa Tan, REHS | Supervising Environmental Health Specialist |
120 W. Main Street, Suite C, Woodland, CA 95695 | (530) 406-4806 | hoa.tan@yolocounty.org