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**SPRING 2020**

**SOUTHERN OREGON**

# GOOD HERB

## ORGANIC BUD

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organic hemp and pot  
growers above the crowd

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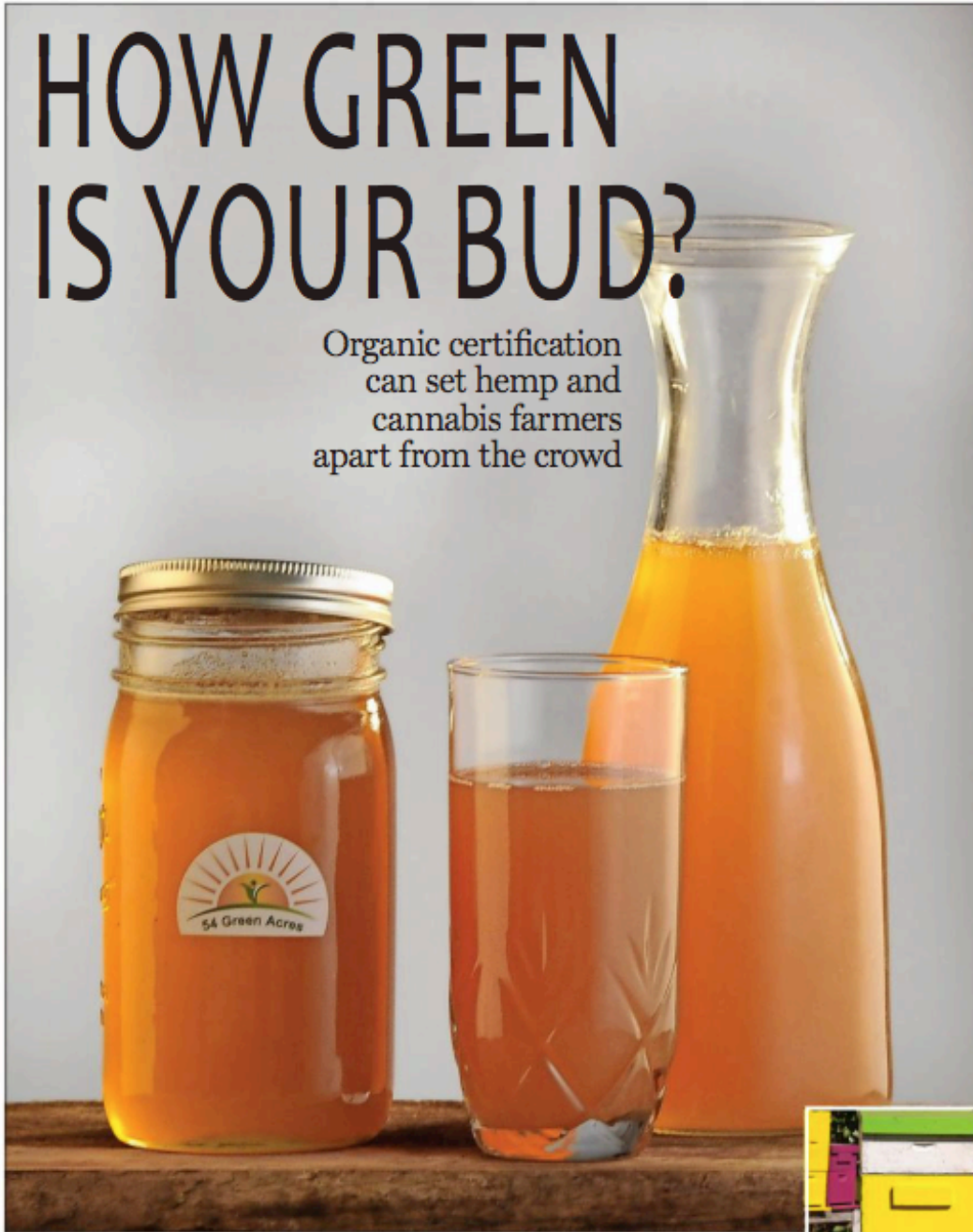
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**ORGANIC STANDARDS**

# HOW GREEN IS YOUR BUD?

Organic certification can set hemp and cannabis farmers apart from the crowd



Everything at 54 Green Acres farm outside Cave Junction, including apples, apple cider, 14 beehives, gardens, flowers, chickens, rabbits and cannabis, is certified organic by an organization called Certified Kind.

By Maureen Flanagan Battistella

Organic certification can differentiate an agricultural commodity, bringing higher market prices and increased margins to the producer.

When the 2018 Farm Bill designated hemp as a federally regulated commodity crop, savvy Oregon growers jumped at the opportunity to certify organic. The label means a lot in today's consumer-driven, health-conscious market.

Organic certification is regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture and cannot be applied to an agricultural product without registration and a lengthy, standards-based inspection. In fact, the word "organic" cannot be used with reference to an agricultural product without USDA organic certification. In Oregon, the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Tilth are authorized to grant organic certification.

Oregon Tilth reports an upsurge in organic certification of hemp since the 2018 Farm Bill. According to Sally Lammers, deputy director of certification at Oregon Tilth, three hemp operations were certified as organic in 2018, and as of August 2019, Oregon Tilth had certified 41 hemp grows and another 14 hemp processors as organic. Of the 55 hemp operations, 22 were farms new to organic certification through Oregon Tilth.

"A lot of the hemp is going into CBD-based body care products and supplements, so there's a genuine interest in having a very clean product to work with," Lammers explained. "My guess is now that hemp is a legal crop, organic certification is also a way of differentiating a product in the marketplace."

The Oregon Department of Agriculture reports that organic products now represent more than \$351 million in annual sales and nearly 194,000 acres in production statewide.



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**VINCENT DESCHAMPS, owner,  
54 Green Acres in Cave Junction**

Thanks to the Farm Bill, hemp producers and processors are eligible for a USDA subsidy toward organic certification costs. The National Organic Certification Cost Share Program offers reimbursement for 75% of eligible certification fees, up to a maximum of \$750 per annual certification scope.

Marijuana, both medical and recreational, is not eligible for organic certification because the product is not federally recognized. While the words “natural” and “sustainable” are commonly found on package labeling and signage, there are no USDA or federally recognized standards or regulations that govern when and how these can be applied.

While the state of Oregon requires many food safety and seed-to-sale standards and tests for 59 active pesticide residues, con-

meets federal organic standards and exceeds state standards for marijuana production, testing and processing.

“When we onboard new clients, we take leaf tissue samples and test these for 250 pesticide residues,” Black noted. “We look at fertilizers, cover crops, cloning, integrated pest management and beneficial insects. We have social justice components in the standards and energy auditing requirements for indoor growers. It’s the farmer’s or food processor’s duty to create a body of evidence to show they’re using sustainable practices according to the standards.”

Organic certification and certification through private, third-party agencies is not easy. Record-keeping requirements are rigorous, inspections are detailed and it can take up to three years to become certified.

“Certified Kind is the toughest, the gold standard of certification,” said Vincent Deschamps, owner of 54 Green Acres in rural Josephine County. “We knew what we were getting into, but there’s a long-term value for us, because when cannabis does become federally legal, organic growing practices will be a long-term differentiator.”

“Our whole farm is Certified Kind: apples and apple cider, 14 beehives, gardens and flowers, chickens and rabbits and cannabis; it’s a fully functioning sustainable farm,” added Caleb Padgett, 54 Green Acres’ director of operations.

An experienced and conscientious grower, Padgett planted his first marijuana seed in Josephine County dirt 20 years ago and is committed to soil health, organic amendments and an in-ground, outdoor growing environment.

“Everything we do focuses on the quality of the product we produce,” said Deschamps. “For cannabis, the terpenes, the flavor and aromas are enhanced because of our growing practices.”

According to Certified Kind’s Andrew Black, growers report that it’s easier to get their certified product into dispensaries and to negotiate price premiums that usually exceed the cost of certification. But more importantly, there’s an intrinsic value in sustainable farming practices.

“We all live downstream; we all breathe the same air,” said Black. “How we farm has a huge impact on human health and ecosystem health.”

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**Caleb Padgett and Jonathan Ruspil, above, get ready for harvest season last fall at 54 Green Acres farm outside Cave Junction.**

sumers are largely in the dark as to the actual farming and processing practices used to produce a product that is directly inhaled and ingested.

For consumers who know their farmer, certification may not be important, but for those who aren’t shopping locally, or for retailers and manufacturers using products grown elsewhere, certification can be important.

Private, third-party inspection programs have emerged to green-up the cannabis industry, filling a need that state testing requirements and federal organic certification programs are unable to provide.

Andrew Black, founder of Certified Kind, got his start years ago with Oregon Tilth. His company has designed an evaluation system based on USDA certified organic standards that



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