

Bad News For the Santa Rita Hills



The white plastic greenhouses of a cannabis-growing operation built in March are seen between the Fiddlestix (top) and Sea Smoke (bottom) vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley northwest of Santa Barbara, California on August 6, 2019

[pullquote]**Santa Barbara County went to big too quick.**[/pullquote]

There is, indeed, bad news for the Santa Rita Hills. **Santa Barbara County has implemented a set of regulations for marijuana growers that are probably the loosest in the state. Among other features the county allows stacked grower licenses.**

[Yahoo! News reported on this August 10.](#) Their article begins with this **little bit of hyperbole.**

Lompoc (United States) (AFP) – A bitter war has erupted between pot growers and vintners in one of California’s famed

wine regions where cannabis farms are proliferating, leading critics to denounce a “green rush” they fear could prove disastrous.

It happens that this encroaches on several wineries and vineyards that grow and create excellent pinot noir. **Stephen Janes the general manager at [Pence Vineyards](#)** is among our favorites. **Also cited in the article is [Fiddlestix Vineyards](#), one of the legendary great growing sites in the Santa Rita Hills. Here’s what Kathy Joseph, owner of Fiddlestix Vineyard, has to say.**

It’s not like any farming neighbor we’ve ever had, and this is all happening very quickly. No one anticipated the visual impact, nobody in the region had ever experienced cannabis in this quantity.

In many ways, cannabis is ruling the roost right now.

Pesticides

One of the big issues is the use of pesticides. California cannabis growing regulations place severe restrictions on pesticides. However wine grapes are susceptible to a number of diseases that are very difficult to control organically. **There is conflict over pesticides being used on vineyards drifting into marijuana growing areas.**

We contacted **Barbara Satterfield** of the [Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance](#). Her opinion is that “Santa Barbara County went to big too quick.” Specifically she pointed out that **Santa Barbara County regulations allow stacked growing licenses.** To understand what that means you need to understand a bit about **the structure of California cannabis grower licenses.**

California Cannabis Growing Regulations

When setting up regulations on growers, the state try to accommodate the existing industry structure. The idea was to support the existing small growers while eventually allowing a transition to larger plantings. To accomplish that, no licenses for large growers will be issued before 2023. Currently only small and medium grower licenses are available. The largest planting allowed is 22,000 square feet of canopy.

But the large growers discovered a loophole: stacked licenses. The growers purchase a large parcel of land and then buy a number of small grower licenses that they can use concurrently on the large parcel. As far as I know, Santa Barbara County is unique in allowing this structure. Here's what Barbara Satterfield says about the situation.

It is causing a lot of stress and concern among our vineyards and and our country neighbors. It is big money coming in and bullying the established farmers by throwing lawsuits and allegations at them for what have been standard farming practices for several years.

One Reaction

The Yahoo news article mentions [Maureen Foley Claffey](#). She and her family are pulling up stakes and moving out of Carpinteria. More about Ms. Claffey shortly. Here's how she is quoted by Yahoo! News.

It's like having 500 liquor stores within three blocks. This has pitted neighbor against neighbor, and I have lost friends over this, And now I'm losing my family home.



Maureen Foley Claffey

Ms. Claffey has quite a history in Carpinteria. She was a **candidate for the local school board. She lived in Carpinteria for 30 years.** Her mother taught in the Carpinteria public schools. Her dad was president of the school board. She is a **small business owner.** Here's what her campaign website says about her business experience.

As owner of Red Hen Cannery, I make and sell artisanal, small-batch jams and marmalades for hundreds of customers in California and beyond. My jams and marmalades are featured at nine stores across California and sold in four weekly, Santa Barbara County farmers markets. I am a sixth-generation California farmer who is proud of my Bailard Family pioneer heritage in Santa Barbara County.

The fact that she is leaving says more about the situation in Santa Barbara County than anything else I could imagine.