

Trulieve: the production of medicinal marijuana in Florida[©]

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the process of starting the first legal medical marijuana production and dispenser facility in northwest Florida—Trulieve. Trulieve is now a Florida licensed medical *Cannabis* provider, <http://trulieve.com/about>. The product produced is low THC-*Cannabis*, which means a patient will not get “high” from the low dosage. The goal is for medical pain relief, as well as the control of seizures—some epileptic children suffer from as many as 100 seizures per day. The plants are produced at an unknown location in Quincy, Florida—for an extraction process to infuse into medical devices via oral syringe, capsule, tincture, or vaporizer. In Tallahassee, the dispensary sells products using *Cannabis* extract—from capsules to vaporizer use (Steven Jiwanmall, 29 Sept 2016. *Insiders: A look at medical Cannabis in Florida*, http://www.wtxl.com/insiders/insiders-a-look-at-medical-cannabis-in-florida/article_edddc022-89ad-11e6-a4ea-03bc56885560.html).

COMPASSIONATE CARE ACT

- Spring 2014: medical marijuana amendment is placed on the November ballot.
- May 2014: legislation passes “Compassionate Care” Act. The Florida legislature is Republican controlled.

FOR A NURSERY TO QUALIFY

- 30 year license by Florida Department of Agriculture.
- License has to be at 400,000 plant production level.
- Product must be available by 1 Jan. 2015.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

- Fall 2014: (1) Rule making sessions begin/New Venture; (2) legal challenges to the rules; (3) lottery system is thrown out.
- February 2015: Special rule making body appointed by Florida Department of Health. There are five people from each region, plus doctors, and other stakeholders.
- July 2015: New rules survive legal challenges and the application period begins. Applications are due by July 2015.
- July 2015: Applications are due to the Florida Department of Health. The waiting period begins. There is no timetable to notify applicants.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- The three parts of an application include: (1) Cultivation—growing, (2) Processing, and (3) dispensing. This is vertical integrated system—from seed to shelf. Our application document has over 1,900 pages (Figure 1).
- 23 November 2015: The Florida Surgeon General calls “winners” and tells them they will be awarded a license. The clock starts ticking. Non-awardees have ability to challenge those who received licenses.

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Figure 1. Our medicinal marijuana application had over 19,000 pages.

DEADLINES FOR WINNERS TO MEET

- Ten days to post a \$5 million dollar performance bond.
- Seventy-five days to request Cultivation Authorization.
- Two hundred and ten days to request Dispensing Authorization.

THE WORK BEGINS

- 8 February 2016: We notify Florida Department of Health that we are ready to begin cultivation.
- 29 February 2016: Department of Health inspects facilities and Trulieve receives authority to cultivate.
- 3 March 2016: First plants are received (Figures 2-4).
- 1 July 2016: Trulieve is given authority to begin processing.
- 20 July 2016: Trulieve is given authority to begin dispensing at our dispensary in Tallahassee, Florida.
- 23 July 2016: The first medical marijuana dispensary in Florida holds its grand opening.



Figure 2. Early stages of medicinal marijuana production in a controlled environment agriculture (CEA) system.



Figure 3. Later stages of medicinal marijuana production in a controlled environment agriculture (CEA) system.



Figure 4. Final production stage of medicinal marijuana with flower heads ready for harvest.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Eight months from the day we received notification of being awarded a license, we accomplished:

- Building a growing and processing facility in Quincy, Florida.
- Building and opening the first medicinal marijuana dispensary in Florida.

ISSUES WE FACE

- Growing marijuana is still illegal at the federal level.
- Banking issues. Transactions are done in cash with customers, and the difficulty of getting business loans through normal channels.
- IRS 280E accounting.
- Emotional.
- Security concerns about protecting production and dispensing facilities, transporting product and conducting financial transactions on a cash basis - with greater potential for robbery.