



CANNABIS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

THE IMPACT AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

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Excerpt 1

There's so much interest in the environmental impact of cannabis cultivation. But why? After all, the cultivation of just about any crop has an unavoidable influence on the environment.

It's a fact that agriculture has an environmental impact, and reducing this impact is critical to maintaining environmental sustainability. However, cannabis is getting a lot of attention because of the general lack of systemic principles and policies towards sustainable cannabis cultivation.

The growth of the cannabis industry and its unprecedented legalization is only serving to complicate things further, making it even more crucial to assess and deal with the impact of cannabis on the environment.

The issues with cannabis cultivation

Although it's often been cited as the ideal crop to cultivate owing to [its decent margins](#), cannabis cultivation has long promoted concerns about many resources, from land to water and air. Now, concerns about energy use have come to the fore, leaving many people questioning the impact of growing cannabis. Let's take a deeper dive into the various negative impacts surrounding the cultivation of cannabis.

High water demand

Cannabis is water-intensive. Although daily water use varies depending on elements such as geographic location, weather, soil properties and cultivation techniques, [studies have shown](#) that the water demand for cannabis is more than that of commodity crops such as rice, wheat, corn and soybean.

Unfortunately, with outdoor grows, the high water demand contributes to water pollution, which negatively affects ecosystems.

Water pollution

Cannabis cultivation, particularly illegal cultivation, is known to deteriorate water quality. Fertilizers and applied pesticides runoff or leach into water systems, adding contaminants into the groundwater, surface water and soil. All this not only poses a significant risk to the water environment, but it may also threaten human, crop and animal health, as well as food chains.

Air pollution

Air pollution from cannabis grows is increasingly a concern, particularly in densely populated areas with a lot of grow operations. The air pollution problem stems from cannabis terpenes.

Excerpt 2

Sustainable solutions for the cannabis industry

Working towards more sustainable cannabis cultivation begins with embracing more sustainable cultivation practices. Elements such as crop consistency, steady revenue and protection of the environment drive sustainability hence the challenge is to make cultivation as environmentally sustainable as possible while maintaining crop quality, profitability and operation success.

More sustainable growing practices

High resource use in cultivation facilities is one of the biggest causes of unsustainability. Addressing the factors that contribute to the resource use will go a long way in making cultivation practices more sustainable.

Can I at any time of the year shut down things such as the supplemental lighting? What can I do to improve the efficiency of the HVAC system? Are there opportunities for water reuse?

These are some of the questions you can ask as a starting point for your sustainability evaluation.

Understanding the root causes of sustainability issues is also important when looking at making growing practices more sustainable. Take water use for instance. Research conducted in partnership with New Frontier Data, an authority in business intelligence for the cannabis industry, has found that the regulated, legalized cannabis industry in California uses significantly less water than other major crops such as wheat, corn and cotton.

However, a lot of the growing that has been going on to date has been illicit, requiring a lot of resources to sustain.

The research estimates that the legal industry will grow by 214% to reach \$41.5 billion in 2025 from \$13.2 billion in 2019. On the other hand, the illicit industry is expected to decline to \$64 billion in 2025, from \$66 billion in 2019. The illicit industry is still thriving, but the growth of a legal industry should help improve sustainability.

Lastly, keeping up with developments in the industry when it comes to adopting sustainable growing practices is essential. Technologies such as precision irrigation could reduce water use, promote water reuse and improve water management. Similarly, HVAC systems that don't rely on brute force to cool and dehumidify can help reduce energy use and increase efficiency.

More sustainable growing practices are also deeply ingrained in an understanding of the environmental impacts of cultivation and so the application of tools such as life cycle analysis will also help improve sustainability.

These are just a few instances where keeping up with what's happening in the cannabis cultivation space can help you make more informed, sustainable decisions.

Excerpt 3

As governments regulate cannabis cultivation and the industry rides on the global wave of decriminalization, there's an urgent need to better understand how cannabis impacts the environment.

Some cannabis growers and manufacturers have already begun to transition to more environmentally sustainable practices, but there's still a lot of work to be done. However, things should become easier as the secrecy that has historically surrounded the industry lessens, and information becomes publicly available.

Cannabis legalization will also likely allow farmers to grow the crop in ways that are much more environmentally friendly. But there's a need for more knowledge. For instance, some of the studies on the environmental impacts of cannabis production have not factored in the rise of more efficient equipment and its effect on things such as energy use, or the difference between legal and illicit grows.

Going forward, cost-saving efforts, innovation and increased knowledge sharing will help reduce the environmental impacts of cannabis cultivation and drive significant sustainability and efficiency.