

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 January 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 (Fig. 1).
- November 23, 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.

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

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

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.



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



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



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



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