



Medical Marijuana

Issue

There are now thirty-four states which have some form of medical marijuana allowed. Eleven of those states, plus the District of Columbia and the territory of the Northern Mariana Islands, allow for the adult recreational use of marijuana. At the federal level, marijuana (or cannabis) is considered a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I substances are considered to have a high potential for dependency and no accepted medical use which makes distribution of marijuana a federal offense. However, medical journals have signaled there are some potential medical uses for marijuana. There has been legislation from members of both political parties in recent years in Tennessee to allow for medical marijuana. Supporters believe this would also be an economic opportunity for growers in rural communities. Farm Bureau policy opposes legalizing the recreational use of marijuana but does not address medical marijuana.

Background

In October of 2009, the Obama Administration sent a memo to federal prosecutors encouraging them not to prosecute people who distribute marijuana for medical purposes in accordance with state law. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, under President Trump, sent a memo in 2018 which directs U.S. Attorneys to “weigh all relevant considerations” and allows federal prosecutors to decide how to prioritize enforcement of federal marijuana laws.

A January 2017 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine concluded there is conclusive or substantial evidence that medical marijuana is effective for the treatment for chronic pain in adults, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and improving patient-reported multiple sclerosis spasticity symptoms. The report also indicates there is limited to moderate evidence for treatment of other disorders.

Possession and sale of marijuana, even in medicinal cases, is still illegal in the state of Tennessee. However, medical marijuana is seeing rising public support. In a 2018 poll from Middle Tennessee State University, 81% of Tennesseans surveyed said they support legalization of marijuana to some extent, with 44% saying it should only be made legal for medicinal uses. Legislation has come from members of both political parties in recent years in Tennessee to allow for medical marijuana. A 2019 bill proposed to legalize medical marijuana through the use of vaping, consumption, or absorption through the skin but not smoking. The legislation failed to receive final action.

In lieu of medical cannabis, many have sought hemp products for a similar effect. While hemp also belongs to the cannabis family, it contains a lower concentration of the delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) compound compared to marijuana. On the federal level, the 2014 Farm Bill established the definition of industrial hemp and set the THC threshold at 0.3% on a dry weight basis. The bill also created pilot programs to allow state departments of agriculture and institutions of higher education to grow and conduct research with hemp. However, hemp was not finally removed from the list of Schedule I controlled substances until the 2018 Farm Bill recognized hemp as an agricultural commodity.

Tennessee producers have already been growing hemp for fiber, oil, and phytocannabinoids since 2015 through the Industrial Hemp Agricultural Pilot Program. The Hemp Business Journal estimates the US hemp industry could be worth as much as \$2 Billion by 2022. As the popularity of hemp products and CBD Oil continues to increase, more and more producers are becoming interested in this lucrative market. Supporters of medical marijuana believe medical cannabis could also be an economic opportunity for growers in rural communities.

Other states are currently exploring the economic benefits of medical cannabis cultivation to agriculture. In Florida, Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried led an advisory committee to explore advancement the medical marijuana market. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food awarded licenses for the production of medical marijuana to eight businesses, seven of which are based in rural communities.

Questions

1. Should people that have legitimate health claims be allowed to attain and use medical marijuana if the treatment is based on science?
2. Do you believe that farmers in Tennessee could benefit from the production of medical marijuana?
3. Should Farm Bureau have a policy position on medical marijuana?
4. Would a policy position in favor of medical marijuana be contradictory to a policy opposing recreational marijuana?

Farm Bureau Policy

Alcohol and Drug Abuse (Partial)

We oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana.

*Produced in 2019 by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation
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