

SoHum's Goose is Cooked



"The goose is dead," I heard Ed Denson tell the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors. He didn't say "the goose is gonna die if..." He said "the goose is dead." I've heard a lot of that kind of talk lately, but when Ed Denson says "the goose is dead" I believe him, because he's the goose's lawyer. Ed went to the supervisors to complain about the excessive county taxes on legal cannabis, but it appears that the confluence of legalization and regulation created the perfect storm for Humboldt County's cannabis industry, otherwise known as "the goose that lays golden eggs."

They could also call it "the goose that eats people, sucks the rivers dry, and turns the community into a ghetto," but you know how much people around here prefer to focus on the positive. Whatever you call it, Humboldt County's cannabis heyday is over. The price of black market cannabis collapsed last year in the face of a historic glut in supply. Meanwhile, state regulators dealt the fatal blow to Humboldt's so-called "small farmers" when they decided to license grows larger than one acre. Suddenly, Humboldt County growers are too remote, too dispersed and too small to produce cannabis competitively in the free market.

The bubble burst. Although it happened suddenly, it didn't take a genius to see it coming. Anna Hamilton saw it coming a decade ago, and she warned everyone about it. She asked "What's after pot?" and the community resoundingly replied, "More pot!" Unfortunately, "more pot" quickly turned into "too much pot," leading to the current collapse in price. It's a classic small farmer mistake, and it's why small farmers usually struggle financially, and fail often. Today, the goose still sucks the rivers dry, and it still eats people, but it doesn't lay golden eggs anymore.

Eventually, life as a small farmer will rehabilitate a lot of black market growers. The people who played smart, paid their land off, love it, and know how to live close to it will survive on honest labor and thrift. For the rest of Humboldt County's 12,000+ black market cannabis growers out there, the people who moved here to grow weed because they thought they could make money at it, it's just a matter of time. You can tell how smart they are by how quickly they scam. The smart ones have already left.

A lot of growers will move on to the next sleazy scam. Don't be surprised if you see them in the health care industry, or working for Big Pharma, but only the smart ones will make that transition seamlessly. Most of Humboldt

County growers will not respond well to the economic downturn. Generations of living the low-status, highly secretive life of a black market drug dealer left us with limited skills, substance abuse problems and chronically low self-esteem, issues we could always cover up, when we had plenty of money. Without money, it's gonna be a bitch.

A lot of people still don't know what hit them. They will crumble along with the black market cannabis industry here in Humboldt County. Broken-down cars will continue to accumulate on broken-down homesteads, occupied by broken-down people who have no idea what else to do. We won't see quite so many big shiny new trucks in town, or cocky young men driving them. Instead, we'll see more hollow, addicted and despondent young men, hitchhiking and asking for help. We'll all feel the pinch, but it will be worse for some parts of Humboldt County than it will be for others.

Arcata will be fine. They took steps to run black market growers out of their residential neighborhoods years ago. They also have the college and a strong arts community that will all help buffer and mitigate the impacts of economic upheaval. McKinleyville seems to have inherited most of Arcata's old indoor grows, and problems, which they are likely to see more of. Eureka and Fortuna have enough economic diversity to withstand the shock, if people, especially in Eureka, could learn to be more humane to each other. Life up in rural North East Humboldt has always been pretty hardscrabble, and will remain so, but here in Southern Humboldt, where the black market cannabis industry choked out most of our economic diversity decades ago, we will feel the impacts of this collapse most acutely. Despite Anna Hamilton's warnings, we remain ill prepared for it. Here, instead of facing reality, and preparing for the inevitable, we put our energy into cultivating a mythology about ourselves as growers of superior cannabis, in a region narrowly suited to it. Unfortunately, that myth only fooled us.

The goose has become a liability. Our dream of becoming the Napa County of cannabis just got buried in bushels of bud from Bakersfield. Now, it's about survival. It's about recovery. It's about reality. For the first time in a long time, we'll have the financial poverty to match our cultural poverty. Ultimately, that's a good thing. When you build culture, it attracts money, which brings prosperity. A fountain of money divorced from culture, on the other hand, breeds dependence and weakens communities. It's time we got back to building culture, here in Southern Humboldt, instead of just growing money.

John Hardin

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Message from the Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers:

"As you move through these changing times... be easy on yourself and be easy on one another. You are at the beginning of something new. You are learning a new way of being. You will find that you are working less in the yang modes that you are used to.

You will stop working so hard at getting from point A to point B the way you have in the past, but instead, will spend more time experiencing yourself in the whole, and your place in it.

Instead of traveling to a goal out there, you will voyage deeper into yourself. Your mother's grandmother knew how to do this. Your ancestors from long ago knew how to do this. They knew the power of the feminine principle... and because you carry their DNA in your body, this wisdom and this way of being is within you.

Call on it. Call it up. Invite your ancestors in. As the yang based habits and the decaying institutions on our planet begin to crumble, look up. A breeze is stirring. Feel the sun on your wings."

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