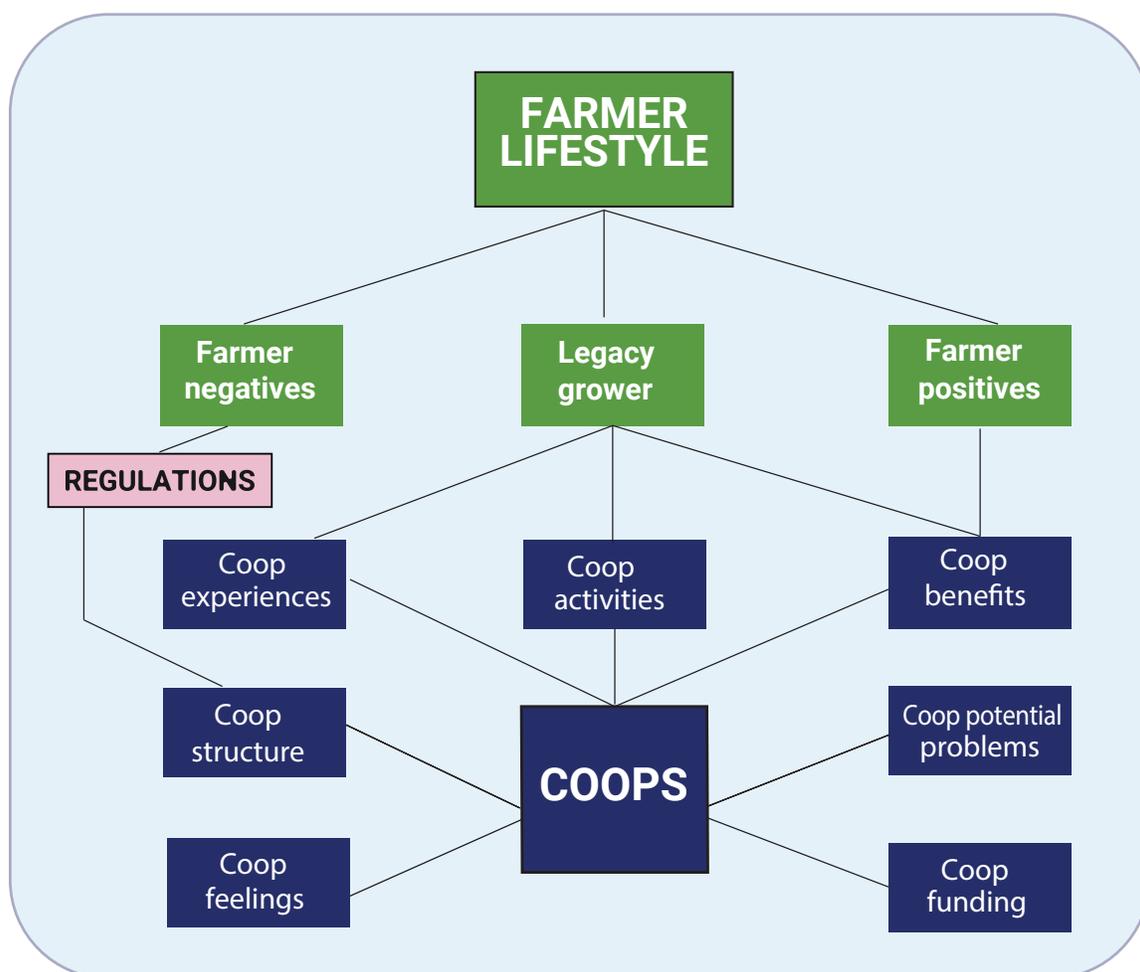


Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis

Prepared by The Center for the Study of Cannabis and Social Policy (CASP)
 in collaboration with Cooperation Humboldt (CH)
 February 2022



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Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis Interview Findings

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ABSTRACT

This study is the second part of a research on cooperative questions related to cannabis cultivation in the Emerald Triangle of California. The first phase, carried out in August-October 2021, consisted of a survey of 81 cannabis farmers on the North Coast of California. The survey revealed that 85.7% of respondents were interested in getting support for cooperative development. This second research dives deeper into the needs and ideas of cultivators by presenting the findings of interviews conducted with 28 of the survey respondents. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews took place between September and November 2021. A team of three conducted the interviews by zoom, and recorded them with the respondents' consent. The data was analyzed with both inductive and deductive methods using Atlas.ti. A total of 1297 quotations were recorded.

As we write this, cannabis cultivators on the North Coast are facing unprecedented turmoil related to oversupply, over taxation, and limited retail access, leading to grassroots demands for the suspension of the cultivation tax and reforms of the regulatory system. In this context, giving voice to the feelings, concerns and visions of the producers themselves has never been more important.

What the analysis found is that cooperatives are envisioned on the basis of the legacy experience of cultivators. And second, that cooperatives are seen to be of the highest need to support the craft of family farmers in the face of hostile regulations. This prompted further questions about the decision-making process between policy makers and those impacted by the policies.

Photo credit WaffleHowse



Fig 1: Redwoods, Humboldt County

Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis Interview Findings

RESEARCH



Fig 2: Map of California

RESEARCH

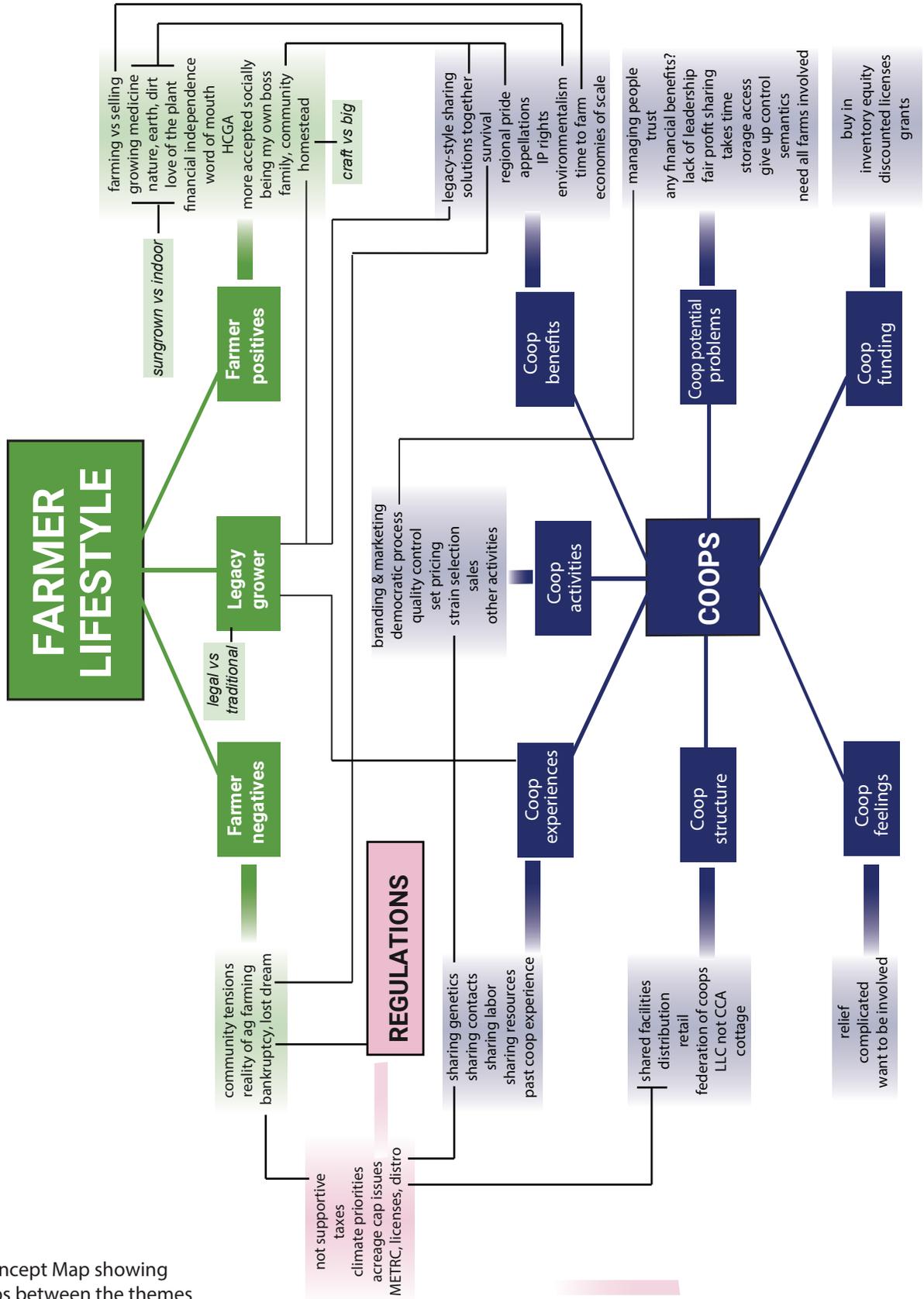


Fig 3: Concept Map showing relationships between the themes

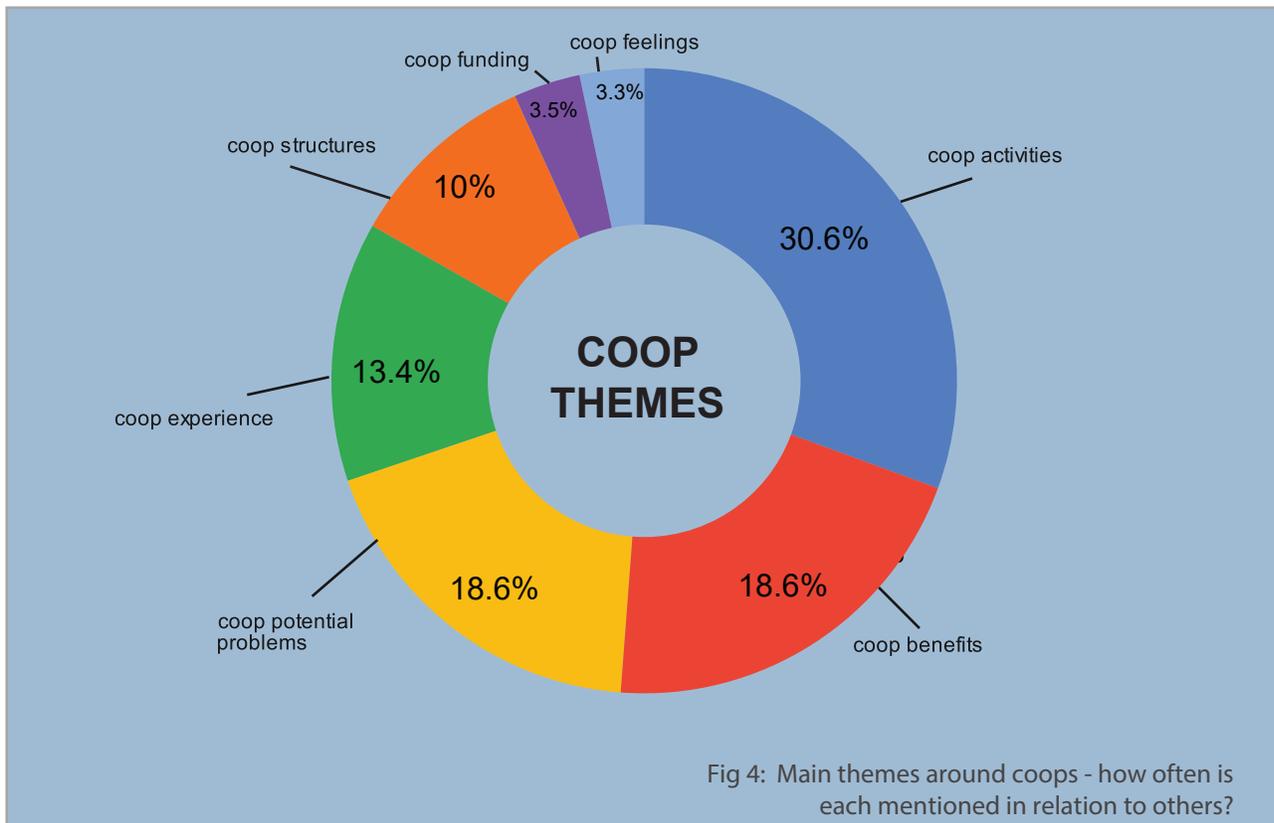
FINDINGS

The three themes that emerge are:

1. The need for **cooperatives (58.6%)**, in particular for branding and marketing
2. The **farmer lifestyle (28.3%)** of the legacy growers and how it applies to cooperatives
3. The frustration of licensed farmers in the face of **regulations (13.1%)** that not only do not support but actively hinder their craft.

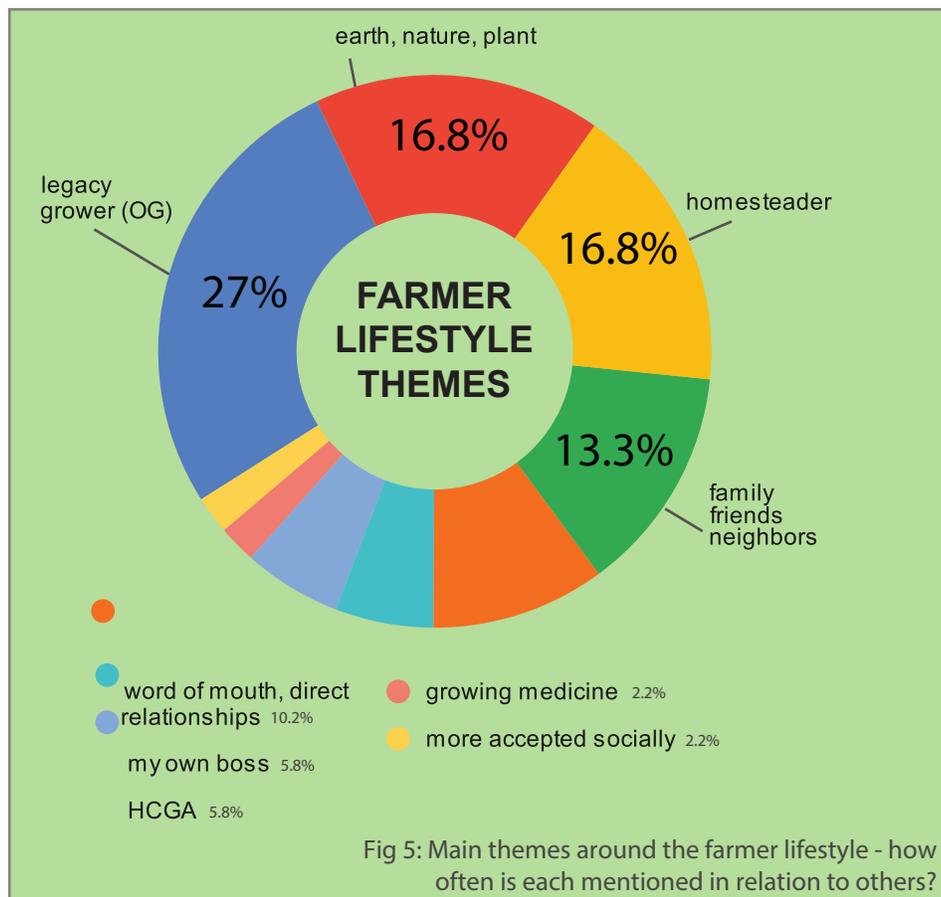
According to the study, cooperative activities are the primary area of interest expressed by farmers, followed by six other concepts related to cooperatives: the benefits and potential problems of coops, past experiences, coop structures, feelings about cooperatives, and funding.

COOPS (58.6%)



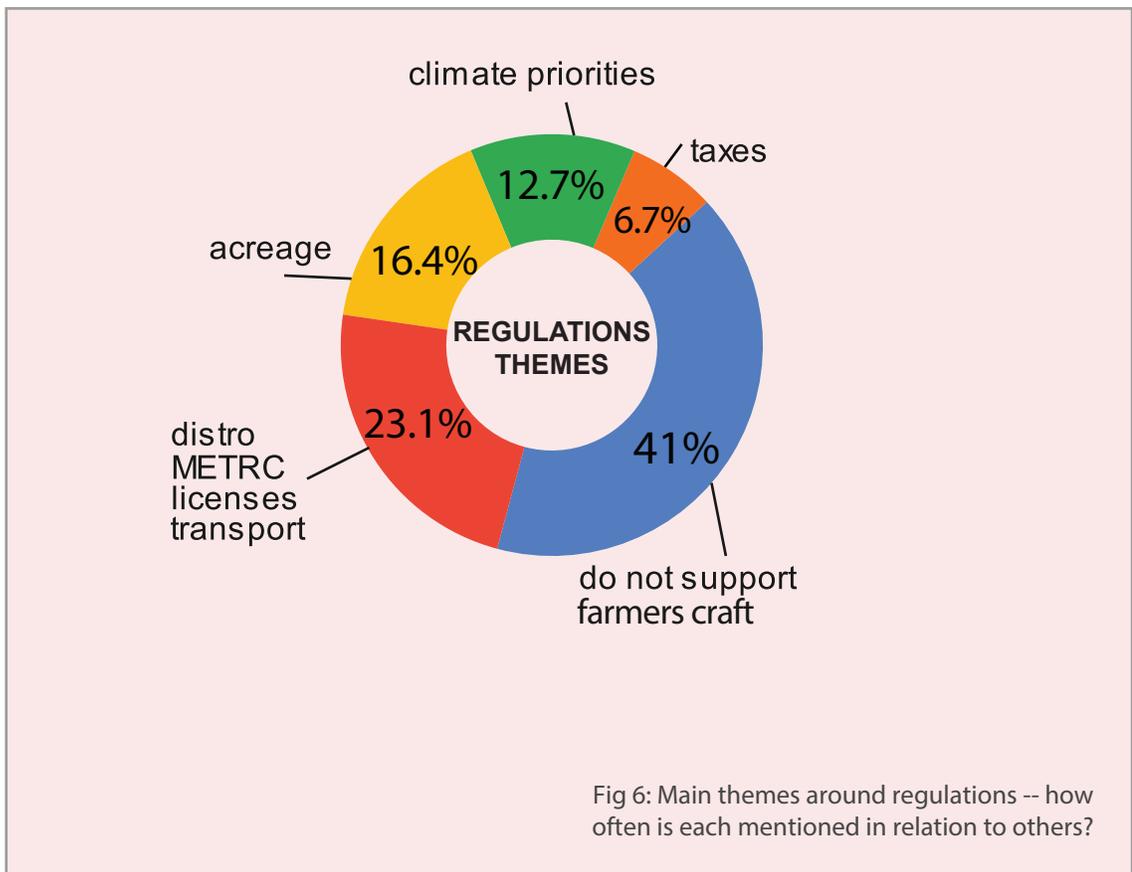
The farmer lifestyle captures all the ways that farming for legacy growers is more than a business activity, it is also a way of life. This divides into three sub themes: the legacy grower experience, the positives of the farmer lifestyle, and its negatives. Strong correlation was observed between the legacy grower experience and the positives of the farmer lifestyle with concepts including love of nature, the earth and the plant; the homesteader life; word of mouth and direct relationships with community, neighbors, friends and family; being one's own boss; the Humboldt County Growers Alliance (HCGA); growing medicine, and the fact that cannabis farming is now more accepted socially. The negatives of the farmer lifestyle related almost entirely to regulations, with an additional concern around tensions in the community and around the demands on any agricultural farmer.

FARMER LIFESTYLE (28.3%)



The third theme to emerge was that the regulations put in place since legalization are causing the devastation of the independently-owned small farms and their craft, with issues of METRC and licenses requirements scoring the highest, followed by regulations on acreage caps, policies seen as inconsistent with climate priorities and taxes.

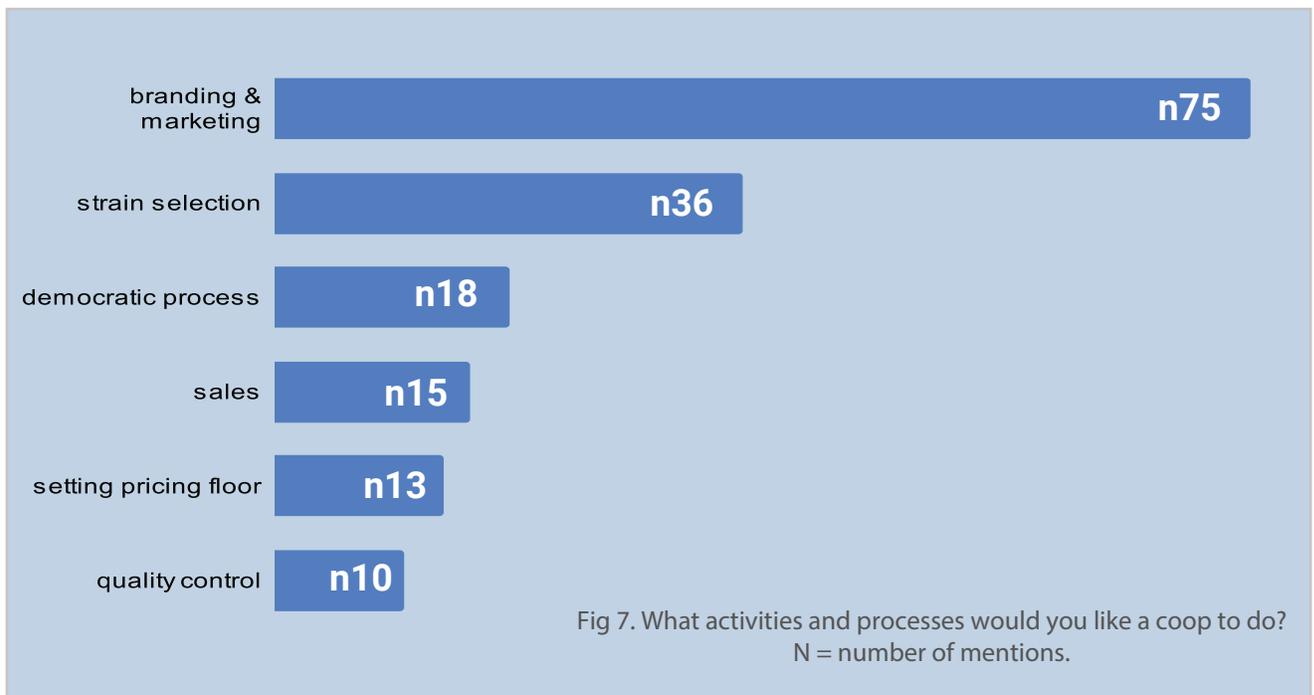
REGULATIONS (13.1%)



DISCUSSION

Let's dive deeper into cooperative activities, the primary area of interest according to the research. Cooperative activities can be grouped into 7 sub-themes: cooperative branding and marketing, access to genetics (strain selection), a democratic process for decision making, cooperative sales, setting a price floor, quality control and other activities.

Coop Activities



Cooperative Branding and Marketing

Branding and marketing are mentioned far more often than any other coop activity that respondents talk about. Farmers see an advantage to cooperative branding and marketing from both the perspective of the producer and the final consumer. According to the interviews, producers would gain economies of scale by branding collectively while also increasing the likelihood of shelf space for their products.

Being able to brand and market together offers financial savings and the ability to bring in expertise:

“Each brand has its own cost to develop and promote. We could do that ourselves to promote our 11,000 square feet of cultivation, or for the same cost, we could be partnered up with nine other farms spreading that cost out 10 ways and promoting 100,000 square feet of total cultivation.”

Access to genetics / strain selection

An integral part of branding is differentiation which starts with a regional product. Respondents spoke of strain selection as an essential component of successful cooperative branding, which brings in the concept of access to genetics.

“Having a place where you can go for better genetics, more affordable options, that would be beneficial in a cooperative.”

At the point of reaching of the market, the capacity of a cooperative to speak for more than one farmer is seen as a powerful benefit:

“There's a lot of reasons why a co-op, as opposed to an individual, would carry a little more weight

when they're going to talk to either other distributors or retailers and say, 'We have all these farmers and we can make sure you have a steady supply.' That would be an advantage."



Fig. 8: Brochure of the Willow Creek Cannabis Alliance

Regional branding should provide a robust ability to gain retail shelf space both because it is a differentiated, unique product to the consumer and because it helps guarantee a product feed all year round.

"You'd have a shelf in a dispensary with a brochure that described a specific appellation, and then you opened the brochure, you saw the different farms, and they showcase the cultivars that they feel are their strengths, that they really enjoy."

A democratic process for the cooperative

Respondents insisted on the need for group-based decision making and genuine representation in the cooperative. We captured 18 comments about establishing a democratic process and training coop members in meeting facilitation.

“Just like other industries: one member, one vote, operating by the Rochdale principles.”

Sales

Respondents see sales as an important activity for coops, including direct sales to consumers, whether in a farmers market environment or with sales on the farm.

“Say six farms operate under one brand, with 6 strains limit, those six farmers have agreed to designate someone to do sales, the sales people go out there, secure the orders.”

Setting pricing floor

Perhaps because prices have collapsed so drastically, respondents suggested that a cooperative might be able to set a pricing floor.

“Small farmers would set the prices to give themselves some insurance and solidity as they go forward when negotiating with a distributor or making sales.”

Quality control

Regional differentiation is recognized by the market when there are standards of quality associated with a product whether that's on the farm or in a shared facility. But a majority of respondents expressed reservations as to where the processing should take place, and by whom, noting that farmers have the most expertise in trimming, drying and curing.

“I think they should hire the crew to get their bud processed. But I don't think cannabis should be processed outside the farmer's care. I'm going to stand on that.”



Photo credit WaffleHowse

Fig 9 A cottage facility

This concept overlaps in the interviews with concerns about the potential for uneven quality produced by cooperative members and the need for grading: “You want to make sure that everyone in the group is putting out their highest quality product, you don't want someone throwing junk in there.”

Coop Structure/ entity

Farmers express a range of views on what structure would best fit the types of activities that the coop seeks to carry out. The most often mentioned structure is that of a distribution/delivery coop, followed by shared facilities, retail coops and nursery coops.

Distribution/ delivery coop

The research shows that farmers envision a cooperative entity to overcome the problems directly caused by the regulations on distribution--problems which include loss of quality control, lack of transparency and risks of late or no payment.

“It’s not for the purposes of making money, it’s just for the purposes of getting things from A to Z according to regulations.”

Shared facilities

The need for a shared facility was mentioned 22 times. The types of activities imagined ranged from processing to drying, storage, packaging and transport, but the common thread is that it would improve quality and transparency. However, the costs associated with building and managing a facility are prohibitive without support. This perhaps explains why although it is a theme for many farmers, at this point their focus is primarily on cooperative branding and marketing..

“Farmers from a local area working together and having a local area appellations processing center, we’d have more control over quality, over the products created.”

Coop Potential Problems

The study reveals that respondents' concerns for cooperatives are primarily whether there is any financial benefit to forming or joining a coop, followed by issues of trust and managing people, and establishing standards of quality.

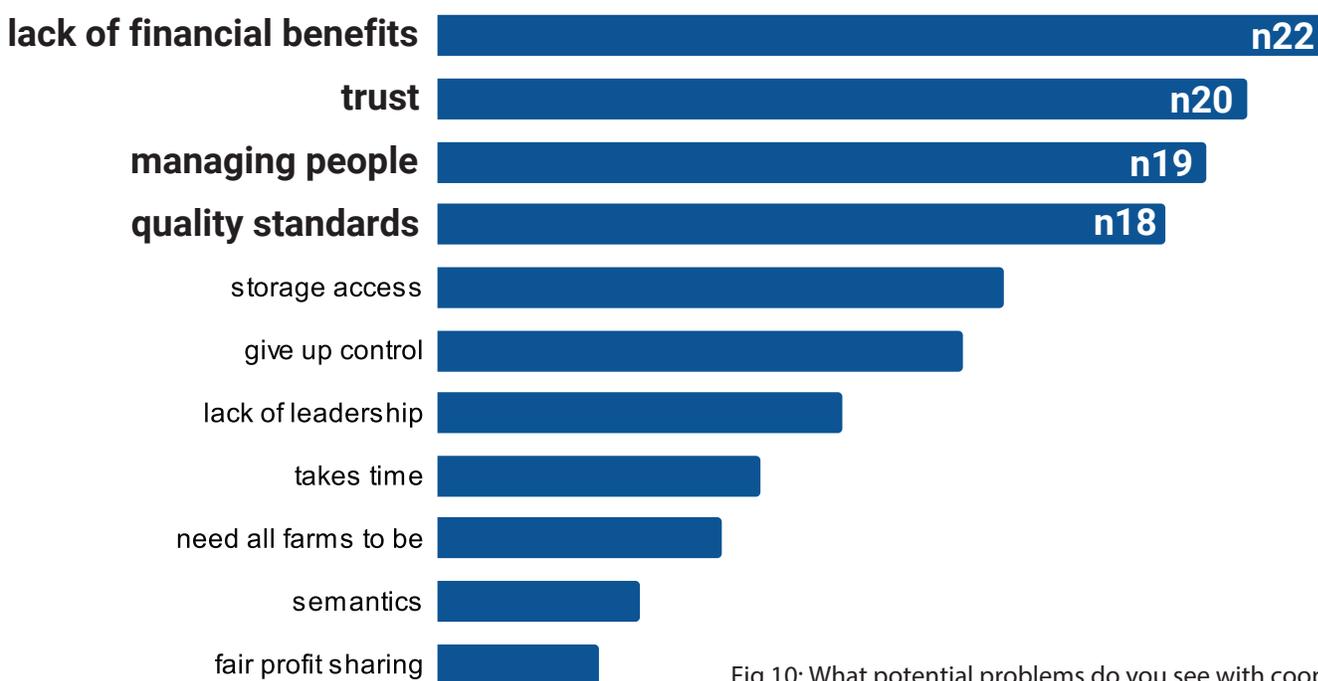
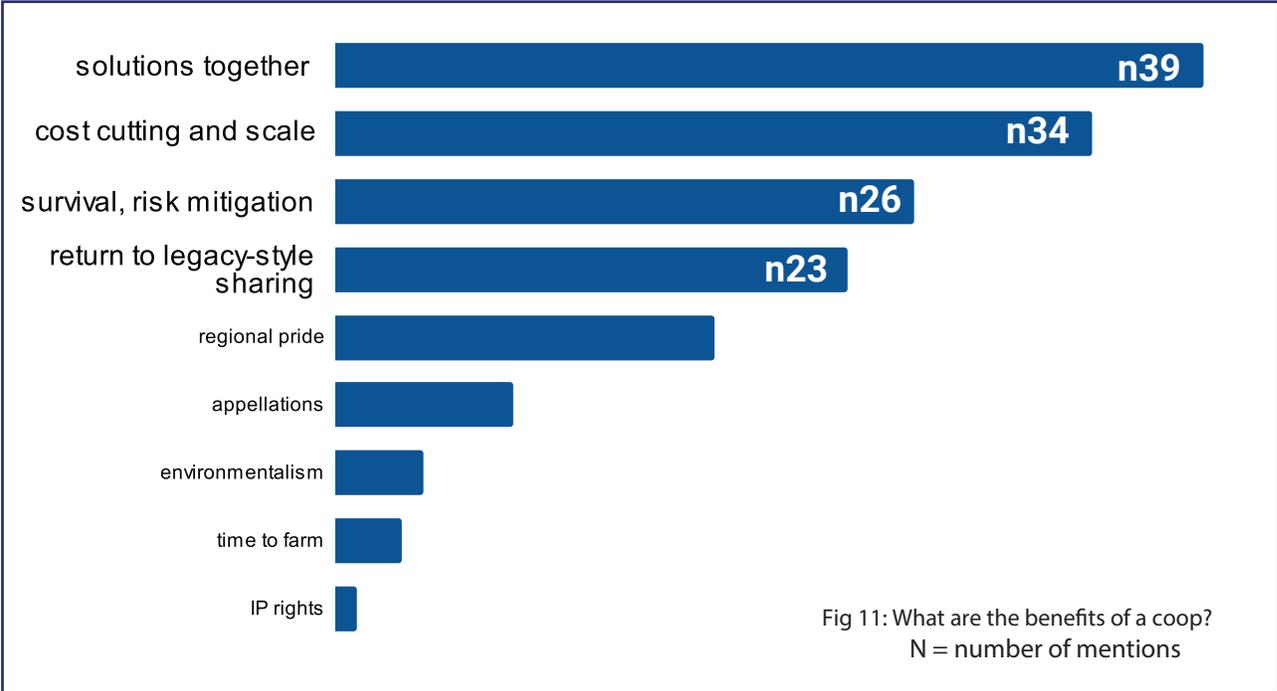


Fig 10: What potential problems do you see with coops?
N = number of mentions

“When we work together as a group, some might say it wasn’t their responsibility and things can get swept under the rug. That’s always a risk.”

Coop Benefits

Respondents equated coop benefits most with finding solutions together and gaining economies of scale.



What’s interesting is that the benefits of cooperatives expressed in the interviews correlate with the positives of being a legacy grower: sharing genetics, comparing notes, being earth-conscious, working together outdoors, helping sell, making the community proud.



Fig 12: Drew Barber, owner of East Mill Creek Farm and founder of Uplift Coop, Humboldt County

Coop Feelings and Past experiences

Respondents feel relief and hope at the idea that cooperatives might develop, while also being aware that the process is complicated. We found 49 mentions of previous cooperative experience, whether formal or informal, tracking closely with the pre-legalization sharing economy of farmers.

“When this community remembers its true history and what made it and those who understand it speak out and engage more again, that we're going to get back to those cooperative networks. Because it's not just how we work. It's how nature works.”

Coop Funding

Grants were mentioned 14 times as the main source of funding, followed by members buying in with inventory as equity.

“Normally there's [federal] grants for forming co-ops and you don't have to worry about the training and the cost of startup.”

Coop Other

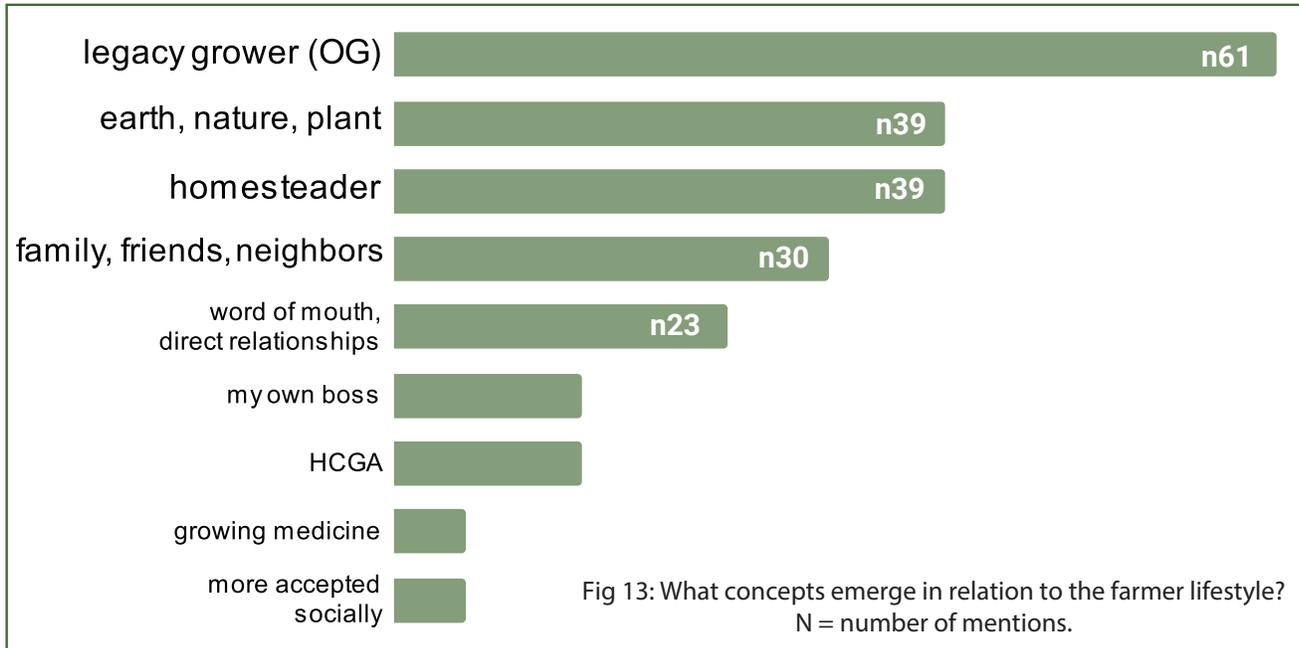
Other coop-related themes that each represented less than 3% of the issues brought up included samples for cooperatives, the ability for coop farmers to sell outside the coop, the responsibilities of a coop towards labor, coop advocacy, possible tourism activities, bartering, sharing equipment, labor and values. Please see Appendix A for details.

THE FARMER LIFESTYLE

The study reveals that for farmers on the North Coast, cannabis is about much more than farming an agricultural product, it is about a way of life. The analysis shows that this way of life is deeply appreciated by respondents and their current stresses relate to the loss of that life as well as the challenges of continuing to produce quality while being hamstrung by today's regulations.

The Legacy Grower (OG) and Past Experiences

Of 28 respondents, 24 are legacy growers—being defined as farmers who grew prior to Prop 64. Many have been growing for decades in the remote hills of Humboldt, Trinity and Mendocino. As researchers, we observed great candidness from the respondents in their experience of pre-legalization farming. Interestingly, the OG life referenced repeatedly the value of sharing genetics and, more generally, the positive aspects of being a farmer .



“But I think the cooperative nature mostly was those two areas: selling the product, and sharing of genetics.”

The Positives of Being a Farmer

Love the plant, love nature, love the earth

Farmers unanimously love working with the cannabis plant, watching it grow and change. This passion is not limited to the plant itself but expands to the whole environment in which it grows, and specifically to the soil.



© Photo by Moonstone Images

Fig 14: Members of the Uplift Coop in Humboldt County.

“I love the seasonal aspect. Working with seasons and the environment and plants and the dirt.”

The homesteader life

A love of nature is intrinsically related to the homesteader lifestyle which respondents define in terms of living on the farm, working outdoors and growing fruit and vegetables alongside cannabis, noting that the typical farmer wants to live on the property: they enjoy the lifestyle, they enjoy getting up in the morning and working on their farm, they're actual farmers.

Community, neighbors, friends, family Word of mouth, direct relationships

Another aspect of the OG life is the culture of comparing notes, helping each other, and sharing contacts and resources, with examples of borrowing tools from a neighbor, helping do road work, volunteering at fire stations and community centers, and so on.

“My neighbors, we help each other. That's what's so cool. I'm four miles down a dirt road, so if I'm like shoot, I didn't get enough gas to fill my generator, I hit up my neighbor, I can borrow one of his gas cans and not spend three hours going to the store. And one of my other neighbors, he helps me do road work on my place and I help him get his place licensed, and I go to meet the county on his behalf.”

Cannabis not commodity

In the Emerald Triangle, cannabis cultivation became widespread with the back to the land movement in the 60s. The notion of growing a plant purely as a calculated object of profit is something rejected by all respondents who mentioned it. Exploring the challenges of today's farmers on the North Coast cannot succeed without also touching the profound human reality of their overall way of life.

“Cannabis is used as a sacred plant for millennia, and to now think that it's going to be mass commodified.....”

The Negatives of Being a Farmer

The loss of that lifestyle as much as the threat to their economic survival is a source of sadness, and in some cases despair, for respondents (47 mentions).

“There are suicides, people are moving their farm.”

“What we all started doing it for is lost in what it has become.”



Photo credit WaffleHowse

Fig 15: A farm in Humboldt County

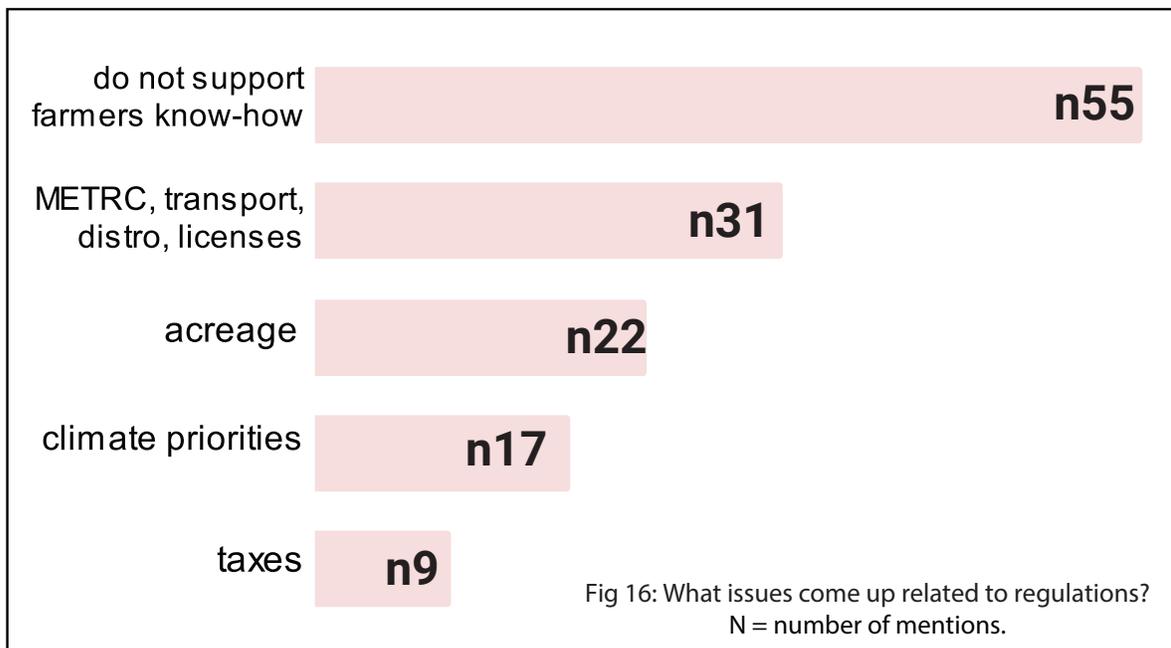
We saw above how farmers approached their craft with a passion for nature, living on the farm, being connected to their community, and producing a quality product. Their destruction is explicitly stated as a result of the regulatory framework.

“It’s colonialism, it’s an extraction model, all natural resources, and all profits get piped out of the area. Nobody benefits, all you have is a bunch of feudal serfs. They’re farming the land, basically barely surviving.”

REGULATIONS: THEY'RE KILLING US

Metrc, licenses, distribution

The vast majority of respondents are licensed, or in the process of being licensed. In some cases, they have waited five or six years to get their permits. Today, early 2022, they are exasperated by regulations that take all their time and put spokes in their wheels.



They are angry at having gone from the legacy traditional market into licensing and finding themselves with mounting bills from government agencies and little to no support.

“They just sent me another bill for another \$1,000. Why? They call it ‘condition mitigation monitoring.’ I don't know what that is. We’re being nickeled and dimed to death.”

In particular, the inability to transport between farms or to get samples without onerous bureaucracy, even in a cooperative, prohibits farmers from practicing their craft.

“We had to make a fucking manifest to take weed from one room to the other. We had to hire someone to do paperwork to bring a pound from one room to another. That killed us.”

A theme that recurred is the lack of transparency across the supply chain. This has two consequences: 1. loss of quality control that results from having to hand over product to processors and distributors, and 2. the inability to develop relationships with the end user.

“I’m a farmer, I’ve always loved cannabis. It’s awesome to grow, it’s a beautiful plant. I’m disappointed in the government’s position on every level. I consider cannabis to be good medicine. Being a farmer means also growing food. I grow fruit and vegetables. It’s hard because of the regulations, they don’t allow me to grow the way I want.”

Acreage Issues

Still reeling from 1-acre cap removed from Prop 64

Prop 64 was to include a cap of 1-acre for licensed farms and nurseries for 5 years, allowing small operators to build their brands and supply chains before larger entities could join. Yet the 1-acre cap was removed just before the passing of California's Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act (MAUCRSA) in 2017. Intense debate about possible behind closed doors lobbying is not the topic of this research, but it informs the sense of betrayal expressed by respondents:

Increase acreage cap for coops

A regulatory framework was developed for Cannabis Cooperative Associations, but respondents say that the limitations make the model useless. In particular, respondents want changes to the 10,000 sq ft cap for farms to join a coop, suggesting that the cap should be removed altogether or changed to 1 acre.

“Farms under 1 acre should be able to join and form a coop as a way to overcome the imbalance of stacked licenses.”

Further, respondents who addressed the issue of cooperative acreage cap were unanimous in wanting to see the overall 4-acre cap for coops be removed.

“The concept of being in a Cannabis Cooperative Association, that has, in its entire membership, less square footage than most farms out there—that doesn't make any sense.”

Regulations need to align with climate priorities

Respondents in every case are supportive of environmental controls yet perceive current regulations as running counter to best practices.

“We say in the state that we care about the environment, but the laws are not environmentally friendly. They wanted everything in green houses which is not the best for the environment, the ID tags are wasteful, the zip ties are plastic.”

One slight positive in relation to regulations, according to the data, is the ability for cultivators to be out in the open.

Taxes

Between the state cultivation tax at 4%, sales excise tax of 15%, state and local sales taxes averaging 10% and county taxes around another 10%, the government takes 39%. Farmers must then deduct on average 8% for testing and packing, 13% for distribution costs and 35% for retail costs, leaving them with a meager 5% share.



Fig 17: Tax and compliance are seen as excessive

Recommendations for policy

The study reveals frustration with the excessive number of regulations and the vast amount of time taken away from farming to address compliance which itself is inconsistent. First and foremost is a simplification of regulations. The analysis reveals the following policy recommendations by respondents specific to cooperatives.

- Right to transport between cooperative members without an additional license
- Funding for cooperative branding and marketing
- Support for cooperative development
- Reduced costs for a cooperative propagation center
- Coop individual member acreage cap to be increased to 1 acre or removed
- Coop total cap of 4 acres to be scrapped
- Special tax breaks for coops
- Engaging farmers themselves in developing policies that impact them

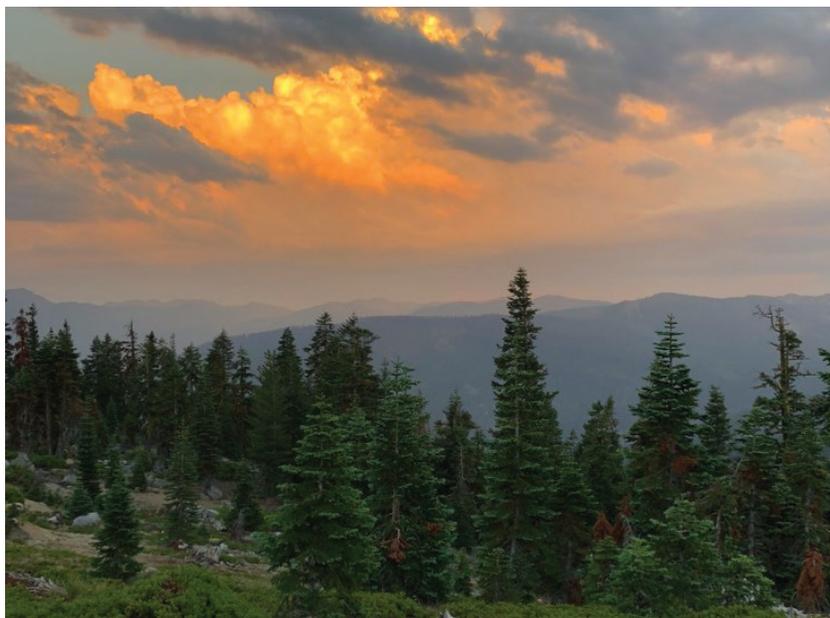


Fig 18: Sunset in Humboldt County

Farmers Must Be involved in Policy Development

The last policy recommendation is indicative of a failed process and deserves its own mention. A pain point that recurs for respondents is that they know how farming works, they've been willing to join the regulated market, and yet they have not been included in the process of policy development. The result is a sense of exclusion, but even more importantly, the result is the development of policies that fail to protect the very producers they were designed to help.

“There's a disconnect between what legacy farmers are facing and dealing with in real time, and what the state understands that we can handle or how this is structured.”

This failure of design is rooted in underlying assumptions that reality is fixed and quantifiable whereas, as the data reveals, the reality is fluid and socially constructed. Further, regulations have been developed as logical models in pursuit of control and stability instead of developing experiential models in pursuit of innovation. We hope that this research helps advance an inclusive policy development strategy.

This study illustrates how regulations affect the farmer lifestyle and motivate farmers' interests in cooperative solutions. However, the interviews explicitly asked farmers to describe their imaginings for cooperatives outside of limitations posed by the current regulatory landscape. For this reason, the relationship between imagined cooperative solutions and current regulations is not explored within this research. Bridging this gap will be a crucial research activity to understand how best to translate and actualize the desires for cooperative solutions expressed in these interviews into the real-world. To this end, one of these researchers is writing a technical policy report that will make recommendations for navigating the local and state regulations to implement successful cooperative solutions informed by the farmers' expressed need to include a sustainable farmer lifestyle as an essential component of solutions.

CONCLUSION

The research reveals that farmers on the North Coast of California are facing unprecedented assaults on their craft, their way of life and their ability to continue producing a high quality product. They see in cooperatives a possibility to survive and thrive.

What's surprising is the extent to which a meaningful and rewarding way of life is an integral part of their practices. The loss of their lifestyle is not just a social phenomenon, it is also an economic one, impacting the quality of their product and the community's prosperity. In such a context, this study is proving highly significant. In the words of one respondent: "Money shows data easily, economics gives you data to work with, which is what we used to get it through legalization, but now we need that human data because what it's doing in this community is devastating."

"The plant is so mysterious, and has such an incredibly long history of involvement with humans, that when you touch it, you touch a chain of custody that goes back 15,000 years."

Surprisingly, while the environment is emphasized as of high importance –particularly with regards to the impacts of indoor cultivation–there were only 2 references to the urgency of climate change. But a deeper analysis suggests that this is not so surprising: if farmers don't talk much about the climate crisis, their practices are already aligned with climate change mitigation. Their vision for cooperatives is informed by the legacy farmer lifestyle; the cooperative vision and the farmer lifestyle come together as one of the proven solutions for deep adaptation in the face of the climate crisis: small, local, earth-friendly, sharing economy, diversified agriculture.

This study approached the question of how cooperatives can help solve farmers' problems from a human-centered perspective. We placed the farmers at the center, listened to their experiences and ideas and expanded into cooperatives on the one hand, and regulations on the other, from the central heart that is the farmers. The study fits within a 4-part process developed by the LiT project at the Center for the Study of Cannabis and Social Policy in collaboration with Cooperation Humboldt.

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Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis

Interview Findings

APPENDIX A CODEBOOK

Code Group	Subgroup	Code Name	# of quotes	Description	Quote
COOPS	Coop Benefits	solutions together	39	Individuals working together can bring about new and better solutions	Being part of a team, like a baseball team or a football team That camaraderie, that mutual support.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	cost cutting and scale	34	How coops can gain economies of scale	There's a lot of reasons why a co-op, as opposed to an individual, would carry a little more weight when they're going to talk to either other distributors or retailers and say, 'We have all these farmers and we can make sure you have a steady supply.' That would be an advantage.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	survival, risk mitigation	26	Being in a coop mitigates risk and improves chances of survival	So us cooperating and making cooperatives and working together as small scale farmers is what we need to do to survive.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	return to legacy-style sharing	23	Parallels between coops and the legacy-style sharing of resources, labor and knowledge	I think when this community remembers its true history and what made it and those who understand it speak out and engage more again, that we're going to get back to those cooperative networks. Because it's not just how we work. It's how nature works.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	regional pride	17	A sense of pride in their region as an integral part of their craft	Our area here and small farms up here have an angle about traditional cultivation that's is unique.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	appellations	8	How coops might help towards appellations	There's a lot of reasons why a co-op, as opposed to an individual, would carry a little more weight when they're going to talk to either other distributors or retailers and say, 'We have all these farmers and we can make sure you have a steady supply.' That would be an advantage.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	environmentalism	4	Developing bylaws that ensure environmental respect	To go along with our message, we'd want to have appropriate packaging, like maybe glass or recyclable materials, not a bunch more plastic.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	time to farm	3	Spreading the responsibilities gives each farmer more time	It might take some of the weight off my shoulders. I'm trying to figure everything out, others have already figured them out, but there's no time or resources for me to connect and have that information. Everyone is so busy as small farmers. That would be helpful.
COOPS	Coop Benefits	IP rights	1	Ideas on the advantages in co-op ownership of strain IP	That co op could essentially be the exclusive holder and producer of that single variety.
COOPS	Coop Experience	past experiences	49	Farmers previous experiences in cooperation	our plan was: we start this organization structured like a co-op, so that when we bring in more farms everybody's diluted equally and we have a board, CEO, and distribution deal with a company that can do all our packaging and whatnot
COOPS	Coop Experience	sharing contacts, labor, resou	33	Farmers used to share contacts and labor	I think a lot of industry people up here—if they know someone they can serve, they might pass along a contact.
COOPS	Coop Experience	sharing strains	19	Farmers used to compare notes and share genetics	Somebody gets a good cut that their buyer wants, you'll definitely give it to a neighbor and honestly I want to help my neighbors and they want to help me and we want to make sure everybody's good.
COOPS	Coop Feelings	want to be involved	13	Respondent's interest in ongoing engagement	It's not really until there was a sense of urgency, I think. That's why I'm here now. That's why I'm putting forth ideas that I think need to be talked about, and I don't think it's completely unsaveable.
COOPS	Coop Feelings	makes sense, relief	11	Sense of relief at not being alone	I haven't met one small farmer who thinks this is not a good idea.
COOPS	Coop Feelings	hard, complicated	1	Reflections on the challenges of working as a coop	It's hard to make decisions in a group and invest big amounts of money. It's a lot less complicated and less scary to invest big amounts of money on your own, you can do things faster,
COOPS	Coop Funding	grants	14	Grants	Normally there's federal grants for forming co-ops. Like \$100,000, you get to form your co-op. You don't have to worry about the training and the cost of startup
COOPS	Coop Funding	buy in	10	Funding from members providing inventory or equity	A percentage of your product. There would be a working attitude between everyone involved, that 'this farm has 2000 pounds, this farm has 200 pounds''
COOPS	Coop Funding	cooperation humboldt	1	CH should get funding to pursue this	It's you guys, and the Trellis program for a bit of money.
COOPS	Coop Funding	discounted licenses	1	Discounted licenses	discount on annual license fees for farmers that are part of cooperatives
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	lack of financial benefits	22	Farmers thoughts on whether they can afford to be in a coop	The bump in the road would be getting started and getting a system and framework in place that didn't cost people extra money and time because nobody has any extra money or time right now.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	trust	20	Concerns about trust and about a coop being exclusionary	When we work together as a group, some might say it wasn't their responsibility and things can get swept under the rug. That's always a risk.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	managing people	19	Merged from smanaging people and sb diplomatic	you never really know who you're working with until you've worked with them for a while. And you know, sharing the same vision and same strategy to achieve that vision, is sometimes a rougher road
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	quality standards	18	Concerns about differing quality between coop members	You want to make sure that everyone in the group is putting out their highest quality product, you don't want someone throwing junk in there
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	storage access	16	Will access to storage become an issue?	YOu'd have to schedule with the person that manages our facility, if you need to get in early in the morning, to try and get on the road
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	give up control	13	Hesitations about the risk of losing the farm identity	I'm just wondering if people are for that. We are individual companies, no one wants to lose who they are. Every farm has different goals, being after different markets.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	lack of leadership	10	Risks about lack of leadership or a member/leader dropping out	If one of them for a myriad of reasons decided to drop out with notice or without notice, then the other farms would be stuck in the situation of supporting the facility, then paying the bills

Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis

Interview Findings

APPENDIX A CODEBOOK

Code Group	Subgroup	Code Name	# of quotes	Description	Quote
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	takes time	8	Concerns that farmers don't have time to take on another new project	I don't think most farmers have the time to hop on and put on another new hat and operate some new business arm.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	need all farms to be involved	7	Coop potential risk or problematic mass needed	I would say maybe somewhere between 20 to 40 farms. I think there might be a tipping point. But I don't know. I haven't experienced that. And I know, getting 20 to 40 people to agree to be a part of the co-op is a big lift.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	semantics	5	Concerns about the use of the word 'cooperative'	you really have a conglomerate of businesses that are doing well, calling themselves cooperatives is a horrible usurpation of the term, very regressive and more of an issue of infiltration and fraud than cooperation.
COOPS	Coop Potential Prob	fair profit sharing	4	Concerns about inequitable profit distribution	If I was part of a cooperative and got whatever reward I got back, if it didn't feel adequate to me that would be one drawback
COOPS	Coop activities	branding & marketing	75	Need for regional branding and marketing	You'd have a shelf in a dispensary with a brochure that described a specific appellation, and then you opened the brochure and you saw the different farms, and they showcase the cultivars that they feel are their strengths, that they really enjoy.
COOPS	Coop activities	strain selection, access to gen	36	How a coop could have a nursery or access to clones at little to no cost	having a place where you can go for better genetics, more affordable options, that would be beneficial in a cooperative.
COOPS	Coop activities	democratic process	18	Farmers thoughts on how coop members can meet, facilitate and decide democratically	The voting, the Rochdale principles, that's the bonus of a simple agreed-upon contract.
COOPS	Coop activities	sales	15	Need for cooperatives to help with sales	When the product comes in, we create a manifest, print those out, hand them with the METRC sticker, hand that to a representative of those 6 farmers, then they figure out how to package it.
COOPS	Coop activities	set pricing	13	Farmers thoughts on how a coop might be able to guarantee a price floor	small farmers would set the prices to give themselves some insurance and solidity as they go forward when negotiating with a distributor or making sales.
COOPS	Coop activities	quality control	10	Activities for the cooperative to ensure quality standards	I think they should hire the same house mom, or whatever they're going to do to get their bud processed,
COOPS	Coop activities othe	worker empowerment	10	Responsibilities of a coop towards labor	The real crux is how are the workers doing? And how is the consent process, the input process
COOPS	Coop activities othe	values	9	Farmers share what they believe is important to a coop in terms of values	It would be important to me to know the people involved and hopefully be all on the same page as far as ethics goes.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	advocacy	7	Ability of a coop to speak for its farm members	That's a huge turn-on, to have a cooperative that's actually politically engaged and where my voice can be heard and my fellow farmers' voices can be heard.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	sharing equipment and labor	7	Farmers ideas on how a coop can share equipment and labor	If we could get four farms together, can we offer a group of three or four people actual full time work, moving around between those farms?
COOPS	Coop activities othe	storage	7	Coop can manage storage for its members	Each different watershed could have a storage facility in a centralized area where you could hub from there
COOPS	Coop activities othe	year-around supply	6	What activities the farmer would like to see the cooperative carry out re year-round supply	If I was to buy into it, say you have 3 or 5 or 7 farms, I would want them not to be doing all the same thing: I would want to have say, three small ones monocropping our top connoisseur products, and they would probably harvest at the end of the year. Then I'd have some light deps to have product all year around, and I would probably have a year-around light-assisted greenhouse so I could have product in the winter. All work in unison to create a menu and a year-around sustainable brand or brands, depending on what they want to do. That triangulation could be very successful in the industry.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	farms can sell outside coop	5	Coops must ensure members can sell outside the coop	farmers should always have the freedom to take their product wherever they want, whether it's to the co-op they belong to or not.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	samples	5	What activities the farmer would like to see the cooperative carry out re samples	samples of every strain that you have as a "donation" to the cooperative, no money, no taxes. A marketing donation.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	tourism	3	Possible tourism activities by the coop	We need to show the specificities, the differences in the county, the impact of these regions, and allow people to come up here and meet the farmers
COOPS	Coop activities othe	compliance navigation	2	Coop provides compliance support to its members	No small business can hire people to fill out paperwork for every little thing.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	barter	1	Coop members bartering with other agriculture	I have these visions of barter economy, where we create these systems where other farmers that produce other goods and we're trading them or there's barter.
COOPS	Coop activities othe	extraction	1	Coop activity can include extracts	Can we get co-op contracts with others that will turn it into extracts/edibles or other outlets?
COOPS	Coop Structures	distribution, delivery	28	Cooperative distribution entity	If one person can get paid to manage it, and then everyone gets to see that it's transparent. So it's not for the purposes of making money, it's just for the purposes of getting things from A to Z and following the regulations
COOPS	Coop Structures	shared facilities	22	A cooperative local service center	I think that farmers from a local area working together and having a local area appellations processing center, we'd have more control over quality, over the products created .
COOPS	Coop Structures	LLC, not CCA	12	Why an LLC is a more effective option than a CCA	Because the laws in California. CCAs only allowed to be four acres of canopy
COOPS	Coop Structures	retail	10	A cooperative with a retail arm	something that has the ability to represent everybody here, and then also set up retail throughout the state.
COOPS	Coop Structures	federation of coops	2	Concept of a coop of coops	then they could all come together as a federation of cooperative

Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis Interview Findings

APPENDIX A CODEBOOK

Code Group	Subgroup	Code Name	# of	Description	Quote
COOPS	Coop Structures	cottage	1	Concept of a coop for small farms	a specific cooperative for the small cottage endeavors. I would like to feel separate from the industrial size grows.
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer Negatives	stress, bankruptcy, suicide	47	How farmers describe the lost dream in their current situation	There are suicides, people are moving their farm
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer Negatives	regulations	16	What respondents like the least about being a cannabis farmer/regulations	They just sent me another bill for another \$1,000. Why? They call it "condition mitigation monitoring." I don't know what that is. We're being nickeled and dimed to death,
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer Negatives	reality of ag farmers	8	Challenges of being a small farmer in any industry today	the margins are so small, and the system is so skewed, that it's almost impossible for a small farmer to exist not just in cannabis, but in any agricultural industry.
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer Negatives	community tensions	2	Observations about growing tensions	it's just really a matter of the people that aren't into cultivation to understand that the cultivators that are here with legal farms gave up a lot to do it. We took a huge risk too. We gave up all our money to go play a legal game. I don't think people understand that we're not asking for handouts, but if the most powerful industry in the county isn't supported, what is?
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	legacy grower (OG)	61	Farmer description of themselves as legacy growers	I remember in the old days during harvest, many of us would get together and have gatherings on our farms and talk about what we were going to do, all our different options.
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	earth, nature, plant	39	Love of the plant and nature	I just love learning how to work with the land and grow things
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	homesteader	39	Farmers describe the homesteader lifestyle/growing food, hard work	The typical farmer wants to live on the property, they enjoy the lifestyle, they enjoy getting up in the morning and working on their farm, they're actual farmers
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	family, friends, neighbors,	30	Farmers describe the lifestyle in terms of friends, partners, neighbors and family	I've done everything I possibly can to work with my community to make it work and to bring the vision that I see cannabis should be like
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	word of mouth, direct relation	23	How respondents describe the direct personal relationships	My neighbors, we help each other. That's what's so cool. I'm four miles down a dirt road, so if I'm like shoot, I didn't get enough gas to fill my generator, I hit up my neighbor, I can borrow one of his gas cans, and not spend three hours going to the store. And one of my other neighbors, he helps me do road work on my place and I help him get his place licensed, and I go to meet the county on his behalf.
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	my own boss	13	Respondents' love of being their own boss	I kinda get to set my own hours (although the plant has its own hours).
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	HCGA	13	References to the local trade association	I'm a member of a HCGA, it's good and I'm on the call every week
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	growing medicine	5	Engaging with cannabis as medicine	I consider cannabis to be good medicine.
FARMER LIFESTYLE	Farmer positives	more accepted socially	5	Respondents like that cannabis is accepted now	To be really public about it, and posting pictures and everything, it's just fantastic to have come out of the curtain, you know
FEELINGS		proud of cannabis and commu	29	Expressing how community is an essential part of the cannabis culture	But our mission isn't about cannabis. It's about community. And we just feel cannabis is a very large part of that.
FEELINGS		sad, frustrated, terrified, adrif	24	Emotions expressed by the respondents about the current situation	The market has completely collapsed. I haven't been able to sell anything. I'm sitting on my entire years' worth of harvests. And I don't know. I don't know. I don't know what's gonna happen, honestly.
FEELINGS		multi talented, optimistic	7	Belief that individuals are capable of many things	I'm kind of an everyman type person who thinks that people are multi talented.
FEELINGS		need support	3	Need for subsidies from the government	without some sort of a guiding hand from the government, meaning some subsidy, some assistance, it won't work
MISC		craft vs big	12	Respondent's thoughts about craft producers vs big producers	There's people out there who are craft people, they just pour their heart and soul into what they do and they're stuck in the same boat.
MISC		respondent acreage	17	The acreage size of the individual respondent if they provided it.	I farm 10,000 square feet
MISC		legal v traditional	30	Respondents thoughts about legal vs traditional market	So farmers are faced with continuing in the black market for survival, because there isn't enough means to move your product on the white market.
MISC		re distribuion	26	Thoughts regarding distribution in the current system	Now it's distribution companies come in, and then they have the power they take your product and what they do with it after they have it is a huge gray area, a lot of farmers have been seriously impacted by that tThey're doing a \$50 or \$100 markup, \$50 at the minimum, and farmers don't really know, there isn't a lot of understanding, once you agree to a price, what's the market? What are distribution companies making?
MISC		cannabis not commodity	21	Reflections on choosing to cultivate cannabis for reasons other than profit	Cannabis is used as a sacred plant for millennia, and to now think that it's going to be mass commodified.
MISC		farming v selling	9	Observations that farmers are typically not strong at sales	It's been a challenge for me, I'm not a salesman, just a farmer. Sales are an issue.
MISC		sungrown, indoor	4	Rejection or acceptance of indoor product as part of the collective	The proof is in what we produce here, compared to an indoor setup that's using thousands and thousands of watts of electricity to produce the same amount we produce with the frickin nuclear fusion ball in the sk
MISC		farmers market	1	Idea about farmers market	The dispensary is the worse part. We need farmers markets. We need access.

Re-Imagining Cooperative Cannabis Interview Findings

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Code Group	Subgroup	Code Name	# of	Description	Quote
PROCESS		must engage farmers	6	Farmers feedback on the policy development process	I think there's a disconnect between what legacy farmers are facing and dealing with in real time, and what the state understands that we can handle or how this is structured. It absolutely does not make sense, from a small farmer's perspective, how they've set this up.
PROCESS		curious about the research	29	Farmers' curiosity about the interested, grateful, engaged	I know that research like this is going to at least give some data, so these policymakers have to listen more.
PROCESS		blueprint	14	Ideas on a blueprint for farmers to form cooperatives	what really is needed is a good solid blueprint that we can take, and kind of do a roadshow to our farmers and say, Hey, this is what we can do. Are you interested in this?
PROCESS		curious about Cooperation H	3	Respondent's interest about CH	I was also curious about Cooperation Humboldt's-- what is their interest, other than just community-building and cooperative agriculture
REGULATIONS	Regulations	acreage	22	Stacking licenses and removal of 1-acre cap is killing farmers	There was supposed to be a cap until 2022 I think. The way that everyone got around that was to stack licenses. It definitely was this money grab by the state, which put legacy farmers out of business
REGULATIONS	Regulations	do not support farmers know-	55	Regulations do not support best farming practices or the farmer lifestyle	I get frustrated by all the things we have to go through which distract us from creating the best product that we can, because we have to spend all this time doing this other stuff.
REGULATIONS	Regulations	METRC, transport, distro, lic	31	Reflections on the devastating consequences of specific regulations	We had to make a fucking manifest to take weed from one room to the other. We had to hire someone to do paperwork to bring a pound from one room to another. That killed us.
REGULATIONS	Regulations	climate priorities	17	Observations about policy that hinders environmental practices	the laws are not environmentally friendly. They wanted everything in green houses which is not the best for the environment, the ID tags are wasteful, the zip ties are plastic.
REGULATIONS	Regulations	taxes	9	Inability to keep up with taxes	We're being taxed to death. And the tax is written such that they're getting a certain amount per pound sold, no matter what the cost of the pound is.
REGULATIONS	Regulations	coop acreage issues	13	Reasons for why the 10,000 sq ft acreage cap on coop members and the 4 acre cap on the coop as a whole should be increased or removed.	I would like to say that farms under 1 acre should be able to join and form a coop as a way to overcome the imbalance of stacked licenses.
REGULATIONS	Regulations	acreage	9	Stacking licenses and removal of 1-acre cap is killing farmers	There was supposed to be a cap until 2022 I think. The way that everyone got around that was to stack licenses. It definitely was this money grab by the state, which put legacy farmers out of business
REGION		Willow Creek	3		
REGION		Salmon Creek	2		
REGION		Redwood Valley	1		
REGION		Rederest	3		
REGION		Mckinleyville	1		
REGION		Mattole	6		
REGION		Larabee Valley	1		
REGION		Garberville	3		
REGION		Eel River	2		
REGION		Dinsmore	3		
REGION		Blue Lake	1		
COOP MODEL		Anderson Valley	1		
COOP MODEL		Danco / Pacific Builders	1		
COOP MODEL		French vineyards	1		
COOP MODEL		Granges	1		
COOP MODEL		Green Ox	1		
COOP MODEL		Humboldt Creamery	1		
COOP MODEL		Kona Coffee	1		
COOP MODEL		Lavender Coop	1		
COOP MODEL		Organic Valley	1		
COOP MODEL		Pachamama	2		
COOP MODEL		Sunkissed	1		
COOP MODEL		Uplift	1		