

ILLICIT AGROECONOMY

Cannabis loves company

Ecol. Econ. <http://doi.org/cd7v> (2017)



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The semi-licit nature of cannabis production in California and other parts of the United States means that proximity to plants and distance from roads often plays a larger role in determining where marijuana farms are located than the agronomic features more characteristic of other crops.

Examining over 1,300 parcels in 54 watersheds in Humboldt County in northern California (an area referred to as the 'Emerald Triangle' due to its status as the largest cannabis-production zone in the United States), Van Butsic and colleagues find that proximity to water does not determine the location of a cannabis farm, while distance from a road increases the likelihood of a cultivation site, presumably due to difficulty of discovery. The slopes of this mountainous region increase the size of the farms but have little effect on location. In contrast, cultivation sites are more likely when there is an increasing number of plants within 100 m, but proximity of those plants has no effect on size.

The varying effects of biophysical variables suggest that social geography may be more important for cannabis production than physical geography, although legalization may allow more open and homogeneous production forms to replace the historically clandestine methods of the region's marijuana farmers.

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Published online: 30 October 2017

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-017-0051-3>