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Mark Schaefer

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Mark Schaefer: Now is the time to forge ahead, not slow down, on cannabis in Nevada County

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The Union's March 31 editorial board op-ed urges us "it's past time to slow down in making thoughtful (cannabis) rules."

Yes, we should have slowed down long ago when the Board of Supervisors passed two urgency ordinances: One was a ban on outdoor cultivation, and one was an interim ordinance that was as offensive to cultivators as the ban.

This urgency interim ordinance was passed without deference or compromise to the input from cultivation representatives. That was July 2016. After that, the county did slow down. Thankfully, we are now entering into what appears to be a fair and detailed process to craft an ordinance that will address the concerns of all members of the community, including the cultivators.

The Editorial Board's plea to "slow down" was partly due to the fact that Nevada County Cannabis Alliance recently approached the Board of Supervisors requesting changes to the current ordinance ahead of the completion of the stakeholder process (expected to be complete by March of 2018). We requested only four changes to the most egregious and inequitable provisions. Unfortunately, after meeting with all five supervisors, we were unable to garner enough support for any of our requested changes.

“Changing the cannabis culture in our county will not happen overnight. Changing the perceptions and misconceptions about cannabis farmers will take time as well. But the alliance will continue to work for that change regardless of calls to “slow down.”

But that is not the only way the alliance has failed to slow down since its inception in October 2016. We have been moving forward quickly in many positive ways.

The alliance has been reaching out and building relationships with a variety of county staff and community interests groups that are most impacted by cannabis cultivation. We have been working hard to understand their concerns and help them better understand our vision of responsible, well regulated cannabis farming in Nevada County.

We have been in ongoing conversations with Community Development Department. We have met with representatives at NID, Grass Valley Police Department, and Nevada City Police Department. We even had a chance to sit down with Sheriff Royal. We are learning about their process and constraints, as well as helping them see the cannabis community beyond the stereotypical image of opportunistic criminals.

We have had valuable conversations with the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools and several principals, and presented in front of the school board. We are finding common ground in our efforts to keep cannabis out of the hands of children and to educate parents on guidelines that can address the problems schools face with cannabis.

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The Nevada County Cannabis Alliance is partnering with the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) to educate all farmers as to best management practices that protect the environment. The Nevada County Cannabis Alliance is co-hosting with SYRCL the [Growing Green for the Yuba workshop](#) on Sunday.

In addition to reaching out to the community, the alliance has been reaching out to cultivators. Through our many educational forums we are helping farmers learn to grow the best and purest medical grade cannabis. We are also helping to prepare operators for compliance with state regulations.

In anticipation of a brighter future for local cannabis farmers, the alliance is planning workshops to teach cultivators about various business models and business management that can position them for success as small farmers.

The alliance has also been involved every step of the way with Nevada City officials as they moved through the process to approve the first ever licensed Nevada County cannabis business — a medical dispensary.

Changing the cannabis culture in our county will not happen overnight. Changing the perceptions and misconceptions about cannabis farmers will take time as well. But the alliance will continue to work for that change regardless of calls to "slow down."

Mark Schaefer is a Penn Valley resident and executive board member of the Nevada County Cannabis Alliance.