



Photo: Etienne Lovejoy

TEHAMA HEALTH COLLECTIVE

The inside story of Direct Access and medical cannabis

Red Bluff, California, home to the biggest three-day rodeo in the world, nitro boat races and lots of good 'ole boys 'n' girls. It's also the location of one of the longest running collective cannabis gardens in California.

This story begins in 1998. I had been involved with a much larger collective garden deep in the heart of the green triangle and had just started this small farm in Red Bluff. I had been lobbying the local sheriff and district attorney to inspect our cannabis garden, but it was an election year, so neither one wanted to take a position on medical use. They knew of my advocacy in Arcata and declined to inspect us, as did the local police department. They did, however, pass on the invitation to our state Department of Justice. The state police, in turn, sent Dan Lungren's right hand man, John Gordinier, to do a stakeout for a few days before the actual inspection—so they knew we were on the up and up. On the day of the tour, we had lemonade, ice tea and store-bought cookies for the police, but they declined to have any and generally seemed nervous about their role in upholding the Compassionate Use Act. In spite of their reluctance, we passed with flying colors and were able to harvest all of our medicine.

The following year, we had a new sheriff and district attorney who both agreed to inspect us themselves. Our attorney was contacted for an appointment and when they arrived, we were all present to witness the inspection. Questions were asked and answered (all in the presence of our attorney), photographs were taken of each plant, and small samples of lower branches were identified with corresponding evidence tags. No plants were harmed and no patients were harassed. After a couple weeks, the D.A. found us to be in compliance and the sheriff's deputies returned to remove their evidence tags, thus establishing our claim to fame—a legal estoppel by acquiescence, if you will. The police could never choose to ignore our rights as patients in this garden, as they had over-seen the verification of our compliance with the law and left our plants for harvest. Since then, we have harvested almost every year. With each crop a letter