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# The Situation Of Cannabis in Mexico

Cannabis originated in Asia and has been cultivated for 8,000 years for different uses. Scientific study of it began in the late twentieth century after Israeli Raphael Mechoulam discovered the endocannabinoid system at the University of Tel Aviv.

This complex plant has 483 chemical components, including more than 130 cannabinoids, terpenes, terpenoids, and waxes, some with mutually opposing psychoactive and psychotropic effects. Historically, it has appeared in the accounts of different cultures, such as the Sumerians, and in Biblical passages describing “King Solomon’s weed.” Today, cannabis has political, economic, scientific, cultural, and social implications.

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Taking this into account, it is interesting to imagine what is implied in clarifying everything about this plant’s responsible, balanced use. Many countries have done research about its application in the field of human health, in the cosmetics and food industries, and in the fabrication of textiles, fuels, and polymer derivatives, all of which makes it possible to define cannabis as a totipotent plant.

For decades in our country, the stigma associated with cannabis or marihuana has limited scientific and biomedical research, as well as its use in industry, including in the development of health supplements, biofuels, and in general its use in biotechnology.

However, in Mexico, institutions such as the non-profit Mexican Association for Cannabis Studies (AMECA), whose aim is to gather scientific, fact-based information without promoting its consumption, have cooperated with Mexican civic bodies, cannabis activists, and legislators. These institutions have provided the latter with solid



Image 1. The author’s legal plants, license number Cofepri-cas-derepsq-1242-2022, issued January 28, 2022. Seed: Santa Rosa Green Seeds.

arguments to demand a comparable, equitable legislation that would allow for the free development of individuals' personalities, as well as the using the plant for different ends, in health, food, and various aspects of industry. They also take into account that the general public requires more information and dissemination of the nature and uses of cannabis.

The debate about its legalization is fraught with different kinds of reactions, ranging from moral prejudices to legal barriers and the state's obsession with punishment. Mexican society has been ambivalent about the plant: on the one hand it praises its benefits for science, above all its medicinal use, and at the same time it rejects its use due to the propaganda that generation after generation has been subjected to, linking cannabis to criminality and addictions.

## Legal Issues

In Mexico, the General Law on Health allows an individual to carry up to five grams of marihuana, and the Federal Commission for the Protection against Health Risks (Cofepris) has the faculty of issuing permits for private cultivation and activities involving scientific research, including biomedical research. I took on the task of finding out what the procedure was for obtaining a license, and my lawyer explained that I needed to request it in writing from the commission. However, I was refused. Since there was

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no reason to refuse my request to be allowed to privately cultivate cannabis, I appealed to the Supreme Court, which handles permits for cultivation, production, harvesting, transformation of different cannabis derivatives, carrying, transporting, and acquiring the seed legally.<sup>1</sup>

## Links to Crime

The recreational use of cannabis has taken on a connotation of being criminal due to the decades-long prohibitionism, which stigmatizes the recreational user, who runs the risk of being investigated as a small-time drug dealer. That censure has not only failed to regulate and contain cannabis use, but it has also unleashed other consequences, including the fact that the stay granted by Cofepris to users is not respected.

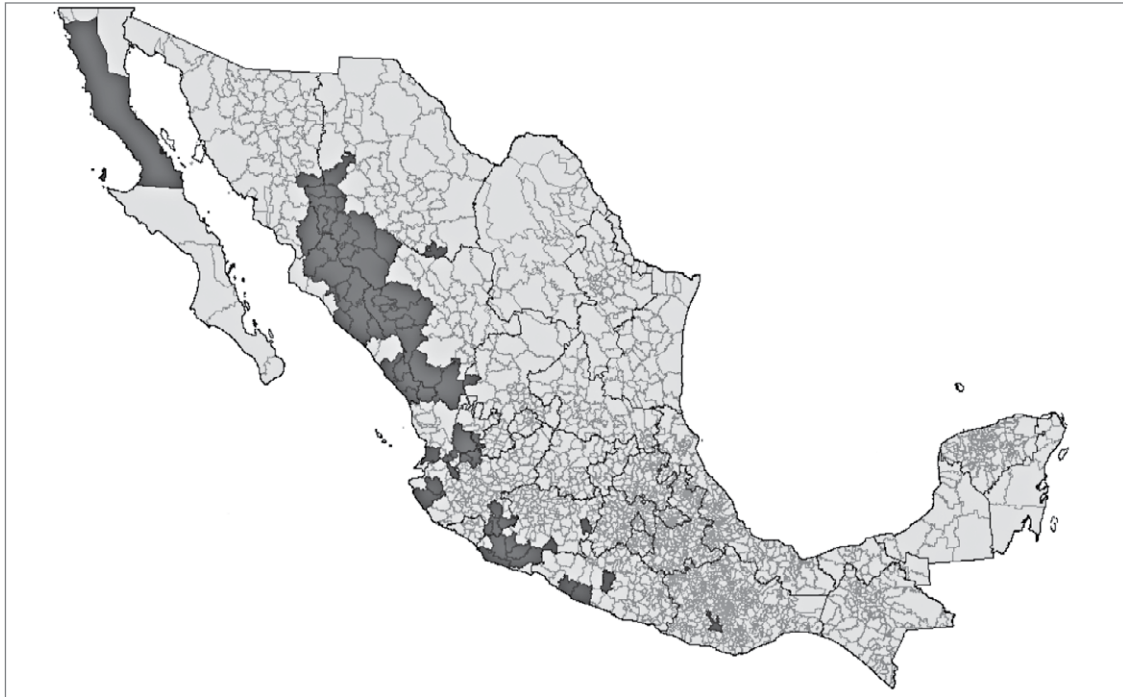
In addition, everyone knows that prohibition has created small- and large-scale economic drug trafficking subsystems with the resulting social and ecological damage to communities that have been penetrated and acted upon by organized crime and by government security forces. The plant's illegality affects the poorest people, who tend to be criminalized, processed, and jailed for simple possession and use of cannabis, and who are the most vulnerable to the violence around them. Among consumers, the most vulnerable are those exposed to the unhealthy conditions associated with its being clandestine.

All these circumstances and, above all, the controversies regarding the issue have made the regulation of cannabis difficult. Although the Supreme Court decision mandates that it should be regulated, what is missing is the political will to develop clear,



Image 2. The author's legal plants, license number Cofepris-cas-derepsq-1242-2022, issued January 28, 2022. Seed: Santa Rosa Green Seeds.

Figure 1  
Municipalities (66) that Represent 87 percent of the Marihuana Fields Erradicated (January to October 2010).



Source: Miguel Molina, “Cuatro temas sobre el mercado de marihuana en México y en el mundo,” March 2016, p. 5, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/85735/MIGUEL\\_MOLINA\\_M3.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/85735/MIGUEL_MOLINA_M3.pdf).

functional laws in this matter. On the other hand, some politicians have taken the position that cannabis should be regulated because that would be the panacea for eradicating the violence associated with drug trafficking.

## Health Benefits

The General Health Law’s Regulation Regarding Control for the Production, Research, and Medicinal Use of Cannabis and Its Pharmacological Derivatives was published on January 12, 2021, in Mexico’s *Official Gazette*.<sup>2</sup> This was a historic step forward regarding Mexican legislation and, based on it, it would be possible to start different research projects and develop what would generate specific information about cannabis and its metabolic characteristics. However, the road forward toward developing and evaluating medicinal studies about the phytocannabinoids (the active principles) and the terpenes (the molecules that give cannabis its smell and taste) is still littered with obstacles. It will also be necessary to define the large repertory of activities that this regulation will make possible, as well

as to visualize new perspectives regarding innovation and development and determine the appropriate quality controls by evaluating the regulatory criteria to estimate traceability and validation of everything from raw materials to the standardization of cannabis derivatives that can be developed through Mexican research, and those that can be brought into the country. That is, different dimensions, such as research, education, health, food, the state of business, and agriculture must be considered. This will be fundamental not only for cultivating cannabis in the Mexican countryside, but also for using technology in such a way that the crops can be used for producing cellulose, paper, fibers, textiles, bioplastics, food supplements, and medications, just to name a few of its applications.

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Table 1  
Black Market Prices of Different Qualities of Marihuana, Mexico City

Point of Sale	Type	Quality/ Strength	Presentation*	Grams	Price (pesos)		Pesos per gram		Observations	Source
					Min	Max	Min	Max		
Hidalgo Neighborhood in a Michoacana ice-cream parlor	Normal marihuana	Low	½ kilo	500	400	400	0.8	0.8	Ask for a special lime ice to get an ounce	Young person
Condesa Neighborhood	Average plant	Low	¼ kilo	250	800	1,800	3.2	7.2		Expert
Commercial Mexicana Mega-Store on Miguel Angel de Quevedo Avenue	Red-Headed Stranger	Low	One ounce	25	120	120	4.8	4.8		Young person
Brujas Acoxpa	Red-Headed Stranger	Low	One ounce	25	150	150	6.0	6.0		Young person
Brujas Acoxpa	Normal	Low	One ounce	25	150	150	6.0	6.0		Young person
Downtown Mexico City	<i>Chafa</i> (Shoddy) (the most common)	Low	7.5 grams	8	50	100	6.7	13.3	30 to 40% waste	Adult
University City Sculpture Garden	Red-Headed Stranger	Low	One ounce	25	180	180	7.2	7.2		Young person
Perisur Shopping Mall cinema	Normal	Low	One joint (2 grams)	2	15	15	7.5	7.5		Young person
Vaqueritos Traffic Circle	They say it's Skunk	Medium	One ounce	25	200	200	8.0	8.0	The dealers say it comes from Oaxaca	Young person
Acapulco Princess	Acapulco Gold (Golden)	Medium	One ounce	25	250	500	10.0	20.0	30 to 40% waste	Adult
Condesa Neighborhood	Hydroponic	High	One ounce	25	1,500	2,000	60.0	80.0		Expert
Southern Mexico City	Indica Skunk (Hydroponic)	High	14 grams	14	1,000	1,000	71.4	71.4	20% waste	Adult
Sunken Park	Hydroponic	High	Grams	1	80	80	80.0	80.0	Less strong	Young person
Tlalpan**	Probably Hydroponic	High	One ounce	25		2,340		93.6		**
Federal District**	Probably Hydroponic	High	One ounce	25		1,820		72.8		**
Average quality/low strength							5.3	6.6		
Average quality/ medium strength							9.0	14.0		
Average quality/high strength							70.5	79.6		
Vaqueritos Traffic Circle	Hashish	High	Grams	1	50	50	50.0	50.0		

\*According to experts interviewed. In Mexico, by convention, an ounce is equal to 25 grams.  
 \*\* Source thepriceofweed.com, November 2012.  
 \*\*\*Source: CFI, based on interviews, May 2010.

Source: Miguel Molina, "Cuatro temas sobre el mercado de marihuana en México y en el mundo," March 2016, p. 12, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/85735/MIGUEL\\_MOLINA\\_M3.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/85735/MIGUEL_MOLINA_M3.pdf).

## Where Does Cannabis Grow?

Historically, the states that produce the most marihuana are Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Sonora, and Sinaloa.

However, in July 2011, the largest extension of land ever planted with marihuana was found in Baja California (120 hectares), but the characteristics of the plants were not made public. Estimates state that 17,200 persons (heads of family) are employed directly in growing and drying marihuana, meaning that 75,000 people depend on the crop.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding prices, for example, in Mexico City, medium-to-low-strength marihuana costs Mex\$9 to Mex\$14 (US\$0.50 to US\$0.75) per gram, or one-tenth of what it costs in the United States.

## Conclusions

The black market in cannabis implies a constant risk for regular consumers; this means that regulations are needed to develop and stabilize a resource with such diversified applications. While it is true that stigma still applies to its production and consumption, it is important to

be critical and forge documented criteria in this regard, remembering the wide variety of applications the plant offers. This means it is necessary to promote a new view of it, given its enormous potential for developing science and, of course, our economy. **NMM**

## Notes

**1** Nevertheless, in 2017, under the presidency of Institutional-Revolutionary-Party-(PRI)-member Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), the Cofepris had already issued licenses for commercially exploiting cannabis. However, it later restricted their scope, which its licensees denounced.

**2** *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, Segob, January 12, 2021, [https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5609709&fecha=12/01/2021#gsc.tab=0](https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5609709&fecha=12/01/2021#gsc.tab=0).

**3** To have an idea of the volume and coverage of cannabis production, the U.S. government and the United Nations stated in 2010 that marihuana production in Mexico might have reached from 15,000 to 27,000 tons a year. If we take the low estimate, 15,000 tons, it would represent double Mexico's annual domestic consumption; whereas, if we take the high estimate, 27,000, it would represent 50 percent of consumption worldwide. U. S. Department of State, "The 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/index.htm>; UNODC, "Examen de la situación mundial del cannabis," *Boletín de Estupeficientes*, vol. lvi, nos. 1 and 2, 2006, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/bulletin/2006/Bulletin\\_on\\_Narcotics\\_2006\\_S.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/bulletin/2006/Bulletin_on_Narcotics_2006_S.pdf); and unodc, "Informe mundial sobre drogas 2009," [https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2009/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2009\\_spanish.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/World_Drug_Report_2009_spanish.pdf).



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