

UMASS AMHERST/MAPS MARIJUANA PRODUCTION FACILITY: PROGRESS REPORT

Rick Doblin, Ph.D.

“...MAPS has partnered with Dr. Lyle Craker, UMass Amherst Dept. of Plant and Soil Sciences, in an effort to obtain permission from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to establish a licensed production facility....”

MAPS has worked for many years to support research designed to evaluate marijuana’s safety and efficacy as a potential Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved prescription medicine for a variety of patient populations. One limitation on the conduct of this research is that the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has a monopoly on the supply of marijuana that can be used in FDA-approved research, and has refused to supply marijuana to two MAPS-supported researchers with FDA-approved protocols. When it does agree to supply marijuana, NIDA sends marijuana of low potency with seeds and stems included. In order to evaluate fairly marijuana’s medical potential, a better quality product is required with definite availability for any FDA-approved protocol.

For the last several years, MAPS has partnered with Dr. Lyle Craker, UMass Amherst Dept. of Plant and Soil Sciences, in an effort to obtain permission from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to establish a licensed production facility to grow 25 pounds of high-potency marijuana. This marijuana would be for use exclusively in FDA and DEA-approved research protocols and would not be for patients approved under State but not Federal laws.

On December 3, 2001, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) indicated that it had no objections in principle to Dr. Craker’s application to grow marijuana at UMass Amherst, but that DEA would need to issue a permit first. I then inquired of DEA about the status of our application, which had been submitted on June 25, 2001, the same day as the DPH application. Surprisingly, DEA informed us that the application had been lost. On December 21, 2001, the UMass Amherst Dept. of Grants and Contracts faxed me a copy of the application, which I then faxed to DEA. In early February 2002, DEA informed me that our faxed application was not acceptable since there was no original signature on it, only a photocopy.

We decided to wait to submit yet another application to DEA until we had two additional documents. The first is a legal analysis of US international treaty obligations prepared by the American Civil Liberties Union Drug Policy Litigation Group and D.C. law firm Covington & Burling, which explains that DEA can indeed issue the license. The legal analysis will probably be completed before you read this. The second is a letter to DEA Administrator Asa Hutchinson from several Congressional Representatives expressing support for privatized production facilities, which exist for all other Schedule 1 drugs except marijuana. The June 6, 2002 letter from five Massachusetts Representatives, whose signatures were gathered by the Marijuana Policy Project, appears on the back cover.

We anticipate refileing our application in July. Although our application is in harmony with the rhetoric of the Bush Administration, which favors scientific research as the means to resolve the medical marijuana issue, it’s too early to tell how DEA will respond. ■