

April 1, 2026

Lake County Board of Supervisors

255 N. Forbes Street
Lakeport, California 95453

Dear Members of the Board,

My name is Benjamin Mitchell, and I am writing to voice my strong opposition to the proposed changes to the cannabis ordinances in Lake County. I will address each proposed change directly, share my personal experience as a multi-county cannabis farmer, and explain why the decisions this Board makes in the coming days will have profound and lasting consequences for this county's future.

Proposed Change: Setbacks Increase to 1,000' from Residences

The proposed 1,000-foot residential setback is, in practical terms, a prohibition disguised as a regulation. Consider what this means on the ground: a 1,000-foot setback grants every neighboring residence an effective 80-acre buffer zone — regardless of whether that neighbor owns a quarter-acre lot or a hundred acres. No other agricultural commodity in California is held to a standard remotely close to this.

The math is unforgiving. A property with neighbors on all four sides requires a minimum of 111 acres of total land area before a single square foot of farmable ground falls outside the setback. On a 200-acre parcel surrounded by neighbors, the usable area may shrink to as little as 20 acres — and only if the farmable land happens to sit precisely at the center of the property. In the real world, flat, tillable agricultural land rarely occupies the geometric center of a parcel. Many large properties have their cultivable acreage concentrated along creek bottoms, valley floors, or road frontages — exactly where neighbors are most likely to be present.

This change does not regulate cannabis cultivation — it eliminates it for the vast majority of existing and prospective operators. It raises the barrier to entry to an unsustainable level, threatens the viability of currently licensed operations, will dramatically reduce the number of permits issued going forward, and will ultimately result in fewer jobs, less tax revenue, and fewer canopy fees for Lake County. It is a disservice to this county and to the landowners who invested here in good faith under the existing rules.

The current setback is consistent with how this county and state treat other agricultural uses. It is reasonable, enforceable, and adequate. I urge the Board to leave it in place.

Proposed Change: Elimination of Long-Term License Protections After 10 Years

Allowing farmers who are already operating under valid licenses to continue cultivating beyond the ten-year mark — without being subjected to entirely new regulatory requirements — is not a special favor. It is basic fairness.

The operators who built businesses in Lake County did so in reliance on the rules that existed when they applied, were approved, spent their money, purchased or improved their land, and began farming. Many of these individuals have invested hundreds of thousands — in some cases millions —

of dollars to achieve compliance with the county's existing requirements. Moving the goalposts after the fact does not improve the regulatory environment. It destroys trust, destabilizes businesses, and signals to every farmer and investor considering Lake County that the rules here are not worth relying on.

Farming is already one of the most difficult and high-risk livelihoods a person can choose. We contend with wildfires, drought, pests, volatile markets, labor shortages, and rising input costs — risks we accept because they are inherent to agriculture and to the land. What farmers should be able to count on is that the regulatory framework they agreed to when they entered into a relationship with their county will remain stable. That stability is entirely within this Board's power to provide. I ask that you do so.

Making Lake County the Place Cannabis Companies Want to Call Home

The decisions before this Board carry consequences that reach far beyond the individuals currently sitting in this room. They send a message — loudly and clearly — to the entire cannabis industry about what kind of county Lake County intends to be.

Some counties have gotten this right. San Benito County, for example, has embraced large-scale commercial cannabis agriculture, kept canopy fees competitive, streamlined permitting, and made it genuinely easy to do business there. They are seeing the economic rewards. Other counties have allowed a vocal minority of opponents to drive policy, tightened restrictions year after year, and watched the industry — and all the jobs and tax revenue that come with it — leave or go underground.

You have an opportunity today to plant a flag and say: Lake County is open for business. Lake County respects its farmers. Lake County understands that cannabis is agriculture, and treats it accordingly. That decision will attract investment, create employment, generate revenue, and build a reputation that compounds over time. The opposite decision will accomplish the opposite.

When cannabis becomes federally legal and companies are able to send their products globally, Lake County has the opportunity to create a destination for those who, similar to the wine industry, travel from all corners of the world to see, taste, and experience the beauty of the finest wine/cannabis producing regions, bringing money through canna tourism to Lake County. This place truly has the potential to be THE cannabis destination in the world! You just have to dream big and allow for it to happen.

My Personal Experience — Why I Chose Lake County

I have been cultivating cannabis legally across California for twenty years. I come from more than ten generations of farmers, farming is in my blood. Over the course of my career, I have operated in Humboldt, Mendocino, Salinas, Yolo, Calaveras, Ventura, Modoc, Alameda, and Lake counties. I have seen, firsthand, how county policy shapes outcomes for farmers and communities alike.

I chose Lake County deliberately. After what happened in Yolo County — where I purchased two ranches, invested millions of dollars, navigated years of shifting requirements, and ultimately saw both licenses rendered unworkable when the county changed its setback from 200 feet to 1,000 feet — I was done with counties that treat cannabis farmers as problems to be managed rather than partners to be supported.

I came to Lake County because of its long-term licensing structure, its common-sense regulatory approach, and its clear-eyed recognition that cannabis is agriculture. I came because Lake County seemed to understand what so many other counties have failed to grasp: that this industry, properly supported, is an extraordinary economic opportunity.

Lake County has something genuinely rare — the topography, the climate, the soils, the water, and the people to become the premier cannabis farming destination in California. I believe that with my whole heart. But that future requires this Board to hold the line today.

A Final Word

Cannabis cultivation, when done right, treats the land with care and respect — with an emphasis on soil health, minimal chemical inputs, and sustainable practices that leave the ground better than we found it. This is an industry that is growing while so many others contract. It creates real jobs for real people, and it generates meaningful revenue for counties that are willing to welcome it.

I implore this Board: do not be the body that turns Lake County into another cautionary tale. Be the Board that said yes to this community's future. The generations of Lake County residents who come after us will be grateful that you did.

With respect and appreciation for your service,

Benjamin Mitchell

Cannabis Farmer, Lake County