

# Uruguay to track pot by genetic markers

March 29 2014, by Leonardo Haberkorn

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Uruguay's drug czar says every legal marijuana plant in Uruguay will be registered and tracked using radio frequency tags, and that state-grown marijuana will be cloned to include genetic markers, making sure that what's grown here, stays here.

That's a much tougher tracking system than those imposed in Colorado and Washington, which recently legalized [marijuana](#) use. Unlike those U.S. states, Uruguay wants authorities to be able to test the pot in any drug user's possession to determine if it came from a registered, legal source.

Colorado and Washington also are trying to tag and track plants grown for commercial use. But neither state plans to track the pot once sold. These states allow adults over 21 to possess up to 1 ounce (28 grams), without requiring them to prove they got it from a legal source. Many other U.S. states with medical marijuana laws allow pot possession by licensed patients, and their police have no standard way of knowing where the product came from or how a user got it.

The rules for Uruguay's official marijuana market will be published next month, but the first government-grown plants won't be ready until the end of the year, National Drug Commission President Julio Calzada said in an interview with The Associated Press. It will take that long to harvest genetically identical pot from cloned plants whose products can be identified as legal by the authorities, he said.

Uruguay will use radio-frequency tags to track plants and products,

similar to the Marijuana Inventory Tracking System Colorado began using on Jan. 1 for commercially grown weed. Calzada says Uruguay already uses the same technology to track beef from field to store shelves.

Colorado's system calls for each commercial marijuana seedling to get a tag when it reaches 8 inches (20 centimeters), or gets replanted in a pot at least 2 inches (5 centimeters) wide. The tags emit a high-frequency radio signal with unique information that can be verified using an electronic reader from several meters away. The tags also have scannable bar codes and other identifying information.

Washington state has a different tracking system that promises to follow its commercial marijuana from seed to sale.

But no U.S. state is attempting what Uruguay plans to do in terms of policing a legal marijuana marketplace. For example, Colorado allows adults to grow their own pot at home, with no requirements to tag or register those plants, or vouch for where they came from, and adults are free to give away any pot they grow.

Washington doesn't allow home growing, but like Colorado, it has a "seed-to-sale" [tracking system](#), and doesn't even try to ensure that only state-sanctioned pot is possessed by legal users thereafter.

Uruguay, on the other hand, is designing a registration and licensing system so complete that authorities hope not only to defeat illegal marijuana trafficking, but also to monitor drug users closely enough to get abusers into treatment and gradually decrease consumption.

Uruguay is the first country in the world to develop a legal nationwide marijuana market. The law approved Dec. 10 will enable any registered adult to buy up to 1.4 ounces (40 grams) a month in pharmacies, or join

a marijuana growing club, or grow their own pot plants—as many as six per family, harvesting no more than 17 ounces (480 grams) a year.

Calzada dismissed speculation by Sen. Lucia Topolansky, the wife of President Jose Mujica, that the government would import pot from Canada, which produces legal medical marijuana, to get the system going.

"The price of Canadian marijuana is significantly higher than what marijuana sells for in the black market of Uruguay. So we would have to sell the marijuana at \$8 or \$10 a gram, when the black market price here is a dollar."

Instead, the government will grow its own cloned plants, delaying the launch until year's end. And that means that for six months following the official publication of the rules next month, Uruguay will tolerate illegal marijuana plants in the possession of licensed and registered growers. However, any non-government [pot](#) must be registered and tracked using the radio frequency system, Calzada said.

"There will be a registration system for the growing clubs and for self-growing. The person will have to go and declare what he's planting. The information about each plant will remain in a database. What we want is to know that what's being planted here isn't leaving the country," Calzada said Thursday night.

"When a home grower registers his plant, we'll do an analysis and provide a card with a certain code. And what we'll inspect will be these codes, which we'll follow by [radio frequency](#). This is perfectly doable."

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Citation: Uruguay to track pot by genetic markers (2014, March 29) retrieved 28 April 2024

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