

Pot-infused edibles: One toké over the line in Colorado?

October 30 2014, by Ivan Couronne

Marijuana shops have sprouted across Denver ever since Colorado legalized the drug for adults in January, but the popularity of pot-infused edibles has surprised authorities, and parents are seeking a ban ahead of Halloween.

Many here are content taking the traditional approach—lighting up a joint—to embrace the Rocky Mountain state's [marijuana](#) legalization.

But alternative ingestion is booming, and it takes a single visit to one of Colorado's 282 dispensaries to grasp that cannabis can also be baked, stirred or sprayed into almost any food: candies, cookies, chocolate truffles, drinks, cereal, even tomato sauce.

The Growing Kitchen, based in a former research facility near Boulder, outside Denver, features two flagship products: "rookie cookies" and "chill pill" lozenges.

The first contains a base dose of 10 milligrams of THC, the active ingredient in cannabis. The lozenges contain half that dose.

In three rooms of the single-story building, plants are flowering in dazzling artificial light.

Employees harvest, dry and trim the ripened buds, from which is extracted a concentrated oil with 65 percent to 85 percent THC.

In a commercial kitchen, young workers in T-shirts mix tiny amounts of the oil into dough used for cookies and other goodies—more than 7,000 per week.

The parking lot outside is packed. With 33 employees, the small enterprise keeps growing, and a new greenhouse is planned.

Identical candies

Edibles are showing major commercial potential—more than weed that can be smoked, said Growing Kitchen's sales manager Holden Sproul.

"Those products are not easily made at home. It's not very easy to extract cannabis oil," he explained.

Discretion is another advantage of edibles. "You can also dial in an effect that's perfect for you, whether it's energy, sleep or pain moderation," said Sproul.

The Growing Kitchen creates only original products that would be difficult to confuse with generics or other brands. But in the dispensaries, one can buy generic-looking candies sprayed with cannabis oil.

Lack of pre-market regulation for such sweets has alarmed some parents, including those who banded together after marijuana legalization to launch an anti-pot group.

Smart Colorado has sponsored two billboards in Denver to warn parents in the run-up to Friday's Halloween celebrations: "Can you spot the pot?" the billboards read, above pictures of harmless-looking lollipops and gummy bears.

"Some people don't even know that marijuana is in candy, and in very recognizable candy," warned Gina Carbone, a founding member of the group.

"The real question is, why is the industry putting marijuana in kids' candy? These are items that are marketed directly to kids."

No pot for kids

Adults eat sweets too.

But after several emergency cases of children accidentally ingesting cannabis, Colorado lawmakers in May tightened regulations on edibles and called on the Health Department to formulate new color and other guidelines that would make pot edibles clearly recognizable, even without their packaging.

Health officials sparked an uproar last week by proposing rules that would have prohibited all pot edibles with the exception of certain liquids and lozenges.

While the recommendations were immediately withdrawn, they sent cannabis producers into a sweat.

"I think it was a reactionary recommendation," said Julie Dooley, co-founder of Julie and Kate's Baked Goods, which sells marijuana-infused granola.

Such restrictions would only fuel the pot black market, already bloated due to tax rates north of 20 percent imposed on recreational cannabis.

Dooley, a mother of three, described concerns over edibles as a non-issue.

"There has been no solid data to prove that regulated, manufactured edibles are causing any kind of epidemic," she said.

Dooley opposes moves by some companies to infuse store-bought candies with pot, but argued it was useless to try to set color coding for all marijuana edibles, especially because several products, like her cereal, have weed's distinct aroma.

Authorities already require pot product sellers to use child-resistant packaging above and beyond what's required for pharmaceuticals and alcohol, Sproul noted.

Today only Colorado and Washington state have legalized recreational marijuana use in the United States.

Colorado's example in particular has inspired similar ballot measures that will get votes in Tuesday mid-term elections in Alaska, Oregon and the capital Washington.

Twenty-three states and the capital district already allow medical marijuana use, according to the Marijuana Policy Project.

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