



POWER IN NUMBERS

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Hay & Silage

FEATURE INSIDE

Medical cannabis enterprise

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THE Gannawarra Shire is set to host a "cannabis academy" to provide on-site training for workers in the rapidly growing medical cannabis industry.

The school will be run by PharmOut - a Melbourne-based global pharmaceutical consulting and training company, which plans to pair it with a growing operation at the same riverside location.

The businesses will be run separately, with PharmOut's founder Trevor Schoerie in charge of the academy, and his wife, Nan-Maree Schoerie, managing the fledgling growing company, Murray Meds.

Murray Meds will mainly produce a CBD (Cannabidiol) strain of cannabis which is not psychoactive, Ms Schoerie said, emphasising that all aspects of production were highly regulated.

Since the cultivation of medical cannabis was legalised in Australia in 2016 there has been rapid expansion of the industry, with the federal Office of Drug Control issuing more than 45 cultivation licences.

Last year, market analysts Prohibition Partners estimated that the medicinal marijuana industry, which was valued at \$17 million, could be worth \$1.2 billion by 2024 and \$3 billion by 2028.

Worldwide the figure is projected to exceed \$55 billion by 2024.

According to PharmOut, the Australian industry will require 10,000 workers across the country over the next two years and there is an urgent need to train people for it.

Mr Schoerie said that while PharmOut had been delivering training in all aspects of medicinal cannabis cultivation around the world for the last two years, the company hadn't previously had a site for hands-on learning.

"For me the driver is a passion to work out how Australia can benefit from this," Mr Schoerie said. "This is a worldwide phenomenon."

"Australia has got a really unique position to become global leaders in the farming and horticulture techniques and in competitiveness."

Mr Schoerie said Gannawarra was selected because of its proximity to the Murray River.

"We chose this location because we believe it has unique competitive advantages...The big advantage you have here is that you will never run out of water, hopefully," Mr Schoerie said.

While water is crucial for cannabis cropping, the amount needed is relatively low compared to other types of farming.

Mr Schoerie said around 10 megalitres of water would be required per year for the Murray Meds plantation.

He said the hot, dry weather and quality water made the location attractive to other growers, with more facilities looking to set up along the Murray.

In the last six months new greenhouse growing operations have been announced at sites near Mildura and Shepparton.

The Schoeries said since arriving in the area they had come to appreciate the challenges the community was facing and were looking forward to contributing positively to the region.

"It's so good to have a new industry to bring to the area which potentially will do really well," Ms Schoerie said.

"That is really motivating for us. We have already got people from the area who are working for us, local tradies."

There will also be employment opportunities for local residents in the coming months.

"In the coming months we will be looking to recruit as many local people as we can and later in the year or in early 2020 we will start to advertise for crew," Mr Schoerie said.

Ms Schoerie hopes that applications for cultivation, manufacture and research licences for Murray Meds will be granted by the Office of Drug Control by the end of the year.

PharmOut's inaugural on-site "seed to sale" training course is planned for December.

Trevor Schoerie and Nan-Maree Schoerie are in the process of establishing a medicinal cannabis training school and growing operation in the Gannawarra Shire.



Weather

TODAY
Partly cloudy, 2-16



TOMORROW
Early frost, sunny, 1-20



THURSDAY
Partly cloudy, 6-24



FRIDAY
Mostly sunny, 6-20



SATURDAY
Mostly sunny, 5-20



Procal Dairies

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