

CRAFT OVER CORPORATE

Aloha Humboldt owners Linsey and Ryan Jones are restoring their Humboldt County farm for new era of cannabis

By PATRICK WAGNER

As the co-owners and sole employees at Aloha Humboldt, Linsey and Ryan Jones spend the entire year tending to each plant by hand. Photo by Ryan Johnson.

Even as the broader marijuana industry becomes more mainstream and more commercialized, cannabis is still counterculture and there will always be consumers who prefer craft over corporate.

And few companies embody artisan cannabis like Aloha Humboldt, where co-owners Linsey and Ryan Jones remain steadfast in their commitment to the environment and to the way of life that has made Humboldt County famous throughout the world.

“The giant greenhouses in Central Valley, we know that’s a reality,” Linsey Jones says. “But even with all the competition, we have faith that people will see the value behind craft cannabis.”

The Joneses are the sole employees at Aloha Humboldt, and they’ve dedicated their efforts to preserving the land by using organic, all-natural and regenerative practices on their farm atop Hogback Ridge in the northeastern corner of the famed county. The small, family-run company isn’t trying to become the Coca-Cola of cannabis or discover the hottest new innovations. They simply want to continue being who they are: two cannabis farmers growing off the grid in the Emerald Triangle. And the Joneses are not challenging anyone to keep up with them.

But now, in post-legalization California, they are being put to the test to prove that what made Humboldt County cannabis world famous can still be a viable business model.

CARRYING THE TORCH

From the look of Aloha Humboldt’s clean, professional packaging, nobody would ever know it comes from a farm with just two employees, who spend most of the year tending to every plant, before harvesting and packaging every gram of flower themselves by hand. It’s an advantage only smaller operators can enjoy, and part of what makes artisan cannabis special.

By next spring, the Joneses hope to have nearly 28,000 square feet of canopy, more than double their current cultivation space, after they renovate a good portion of their farm.

Aloha Humboldt grows on a “legacy” plot of land, meaning it has been used for

cannabis cultivation since the 1980s. The farm still reflects those outlaw days of harvest-and-hide agriculture: the bones of old greenhouses implanted eight feet deep into hillsides are relics of the time before the Joneses took over the land in 2016.

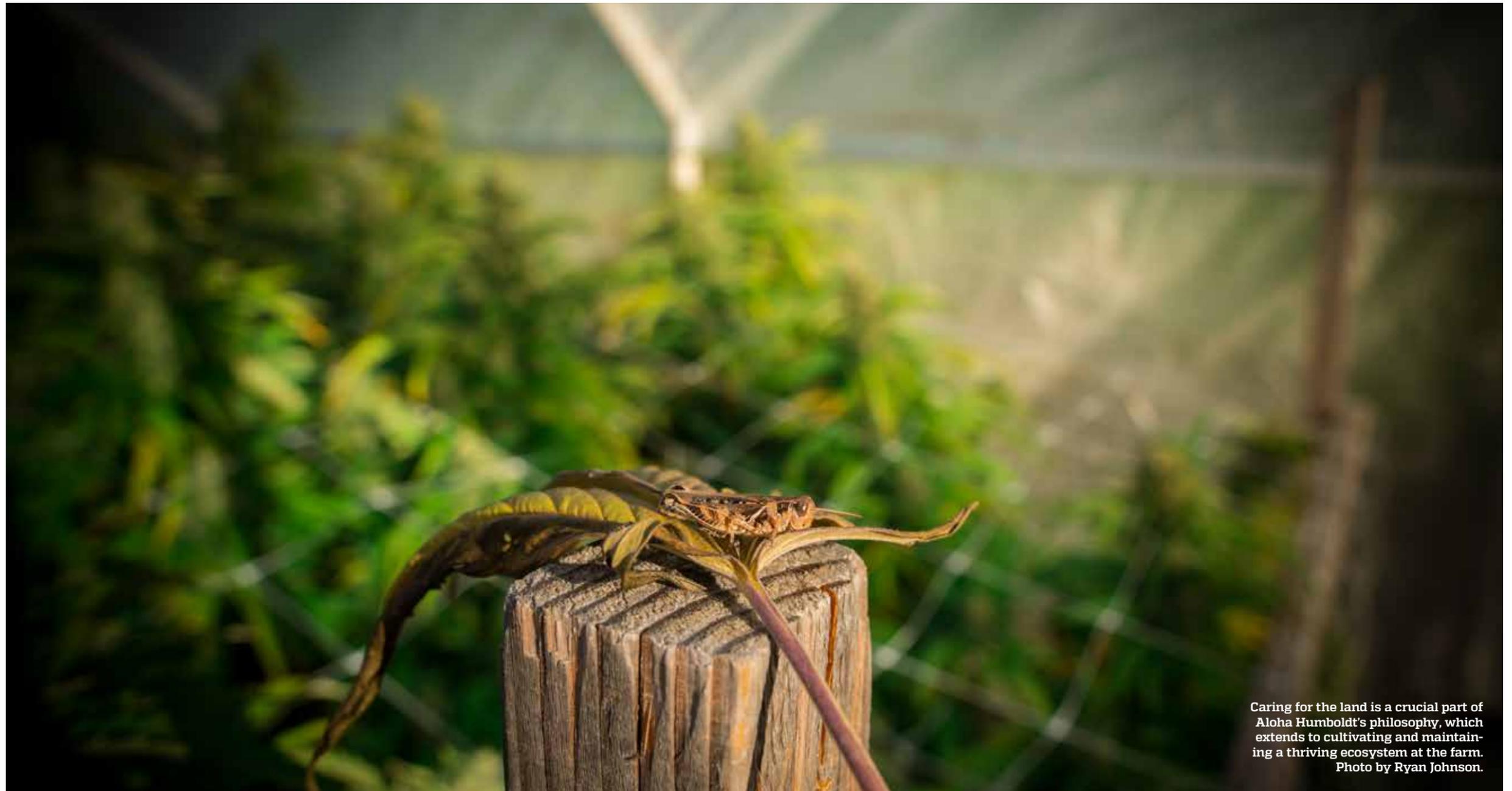
These remnants are somewhat charming reminders of cannabis growers from the past, but in the new, legal atmosphere, they’re obstacles that need to be removed.

“They didn’t have an engineer come out and do the grading plans or things like that,” Linsey says of the farmers who originally developed the land. “In the winter the greenhouses would fill with water and de-

stabilize the land.”

To be compliant with current regulations, the Joneses had to stabilize the landscape and undo much of what the previous farmers had done, which had been more for camouflage than for function.

The permitting process brought all kinds of officials and inspectors to the once clandestine farm. Because so many Native American tribes have called the area home, the Joneses had to hire an archeologist to survey the land for any tribal relics. Since some of the soil on the property can’t support heavy machinery, the Joneses had to hire a geologist to conduct a stability anal-



Caring for the land is a crucial part of Aloha Humboldt’s philosophy, which extends to cultivating and maintaining a thriving ecosystem at the farm. Photo by Ryan Johnson.

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ysis on the soils, before the engineers could get a “go-ahead” to begin grading the property and bring in construction vehicles to fill in the land that once housed the entrenched greenhouses. The process has left Aloha Humboldt waiting for the grading permit from the county to begin repairs.

“It’s been really important for us to do this all by the books,” Linsey says. “But it’s been a real challenge waiting for our grading permit since Humboldt County is so backed up.”

The couple hopes for an approval from the county before the winter rains begin. Otherwise they will have to wait until spring when the weather is more hospitable.



Artisan Gothic: Linsey and Ryan Jones' take on the classic American painting. Photo by Green Goddess Photography.

“Right now, we’re waiting and being stewards of the land,” Linsey says. “We focus on the stable parts of our land at the top of our property.”

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Although Aloha Humboldt operates within an entirely new world of permits and regulations, much of its philosophy can be traced to the earliest “back-to-nature” farmers of the region.

The Joneses employ many of the production methods that are central to the legacy of Humboldt County farmers: nitrogen fixing with cover crops, living soils, vermiculture compost, planting by the lunar cycle, compost teas, integrated pest management and regenerative farming practices.

“We are trying to have much more diverse farming practices,” Linsey says.

Her next sustainability milestone is getting the farm its DEM Pure certification, through Dragonfly Earth Medicine.

Many growers hope conscious consumers will gravitate toward the environmentally friendly efforts of small family farms compared to the commercial nature of the major producers.

With a majority of the farm’s land on hiatus for renovations, Aloha Humboldt has been using three small greenhouses and a plot in an upper meadow surrounded by trees.

While the shaded area affects the yield and the density of the flowers, Linsey believes it also contributes to the unique terpene profiles of the finished product. Dense strains, such as those of the OG variety, haven’t performed as well on the land as Aloha Humboldt’s Lemon Meringue sativa or hybrids such as Blueberry Cookies and Golden Lemon. But the learning process helps guide the Joneses to what the farm will grow next spring.

“The way that people are getting with different appellations, it just makes sense to grow with the land,” Linsey says.

A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS

Linsey describes Humboldt County as an idyllic, close-knit community, a surreal, small-town atmosphere where people smile as they pass one another on the street, where the post office clerk already knows who you are when you walk in the door, and everyone, in some fashion, is connected to the cannabis industry.

Having people you can trust is every bit as important in the legal



While it might not be economically feasible for larger commercial growers, Aloha Humboldt hand-trims its flower for a final product that cannabis connoisseurs prefer. Photo by Green Goddess Photography.



Aloha Humboldt uses only the very top of each cola for every eighth, ensuring customers receive one or two well-manicured buds per package. Photo by Ryan Johnson.

industry as it was in the outlaw days of yesteryear.

“Farming is an intense and demanding job,” she says, “so you really need to rely on your friends out here in such a rural community.”

And the Joneses have quite a few friends in the nearby town of Willow Creek where they have lived for the past few years. The archeologist who surveyed their farm was a friend of a friend and did the work at a considerable discount. The design work for the Aloha Humboldt packaging and logo was a longtime friend of Linsey’s; another longtime friend works for the Royal Gold soil company; yet another provides insight on oils and tinctures.

Legalization has also helped put an end to the “hush-hush days of Prop 215” and helped the Joneses meet new friends in the community.

“It’s interesting and different to be out there taking pictures and putting ourselves out there on social media,” Linsey says. “We have so many farmers out here in the cannabis community. It’s amazing to see how many people are either directly or indirectly benefited from cannabis. It’s the lifeblood of our community.”

But no matter how many friends they have in Willow Creek, the Joneses still cultivate every plant, harvest every crop, roll every joint and package every eighth.

“We have some long days up there,” Linsey says. ■



Michigan transplants Ryan and Linsey Jones moved to Humboldt County together in 2002 for a simpler life in the cannabis industry. Photo by Ryan Johnson.