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Colorado farm poised to supply state's flourishing marijuana industry (Slideshow)

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A sprawling, 36-acre farm in Pueblo County is poised to play a big role in Colorado's burgeoning, \$1 billion marijuana industry, which in 2015 brought in \$135 million in state taxes and fees.

That's a 44 percent increase from the year before, and foreshadows Colorado growing role a national market that some analysts estimate will reach \$22 billion by the year 2020.

It's also one reason why Los Suenos Farms, the nation's largest legal outdoor marijuana grow operation, is sitting pretty as one that will likely play a major role in supplying the state's dispensaries. Eighty percent of Los Sueno's wholesale clients come from Colorado, 70 percent in metro Denver. Denver is home to 85 percent of Colorado's marijuana dispensaries and in 2015 the city collected \$29 million in cannabis-related taxes and fees.

The farm — located on the state's banana belt near the Arkansas Ricer — opened less than a year ago, in April 2015. Sales director Michael Cadwell



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said the first harvest was a major success, yielding about 20 tons of marijuana from the approximate 10,000 plants there.

"Last fall, it was just the outdoor crop," Caldwell said. "We haven't even been in business one year, but our first harvest was very successful."

Click the image above for a photo tour of Los Suenos Farms.

The city of Pueblo will charge a 5 percent excise tax on sales of the crops, money that's expected to generate \$1.7 million in college scholarships for local residents and help fund sidewalk and rural road projects.

This year, Los Suenos added two indoor greenhouses, 25 full-time staffers and about 60 temp workers who help plant the crop during the first week of June, and then pull the crops up during the fall harvest.

"Our facility is outdoor, all-natural, sun-grown cannabis. It hasn't hailed here in 14 years," Caldwell said, adding that as long as the weather holds, it makes for great growing conditions. "We're pesticide free too. Nature takes its course down there. The plants don't get sprayed."

Caldwell said that Los Suenos' grow philosophy is part of the long-time movement in the state where people shy away from food that's been laden with pesticides.

"Originally people started growing indoor because they were literally hiding from the police, and what they're doing indoors is recreating nature inside, which is difficult," Caldwell said. "Plus, the cost to produce and the cost of the grid for electricity is starting to weight operations down. But our costs are very, very low."

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