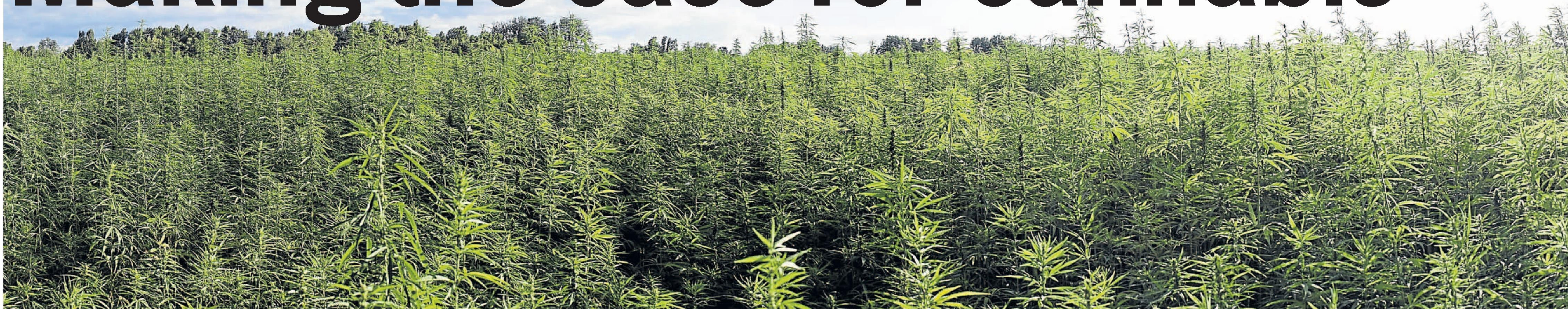


# Making the case for cannabis



**FIELDS OF FUNDS:** A Port Elizabeth man wants the 'dagga' dragon slain and the SA usage changed to 'marijuana' or 'cannabis' to facilitate legal and lucrative production

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

**H**UNDREDS of millions of rand could be raised by taxing marijuana and deploying it to solve the university fees crisis. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

The man behind the innovative idea, Port Elizabeth resident David Pittaway, said the aim would be to tax marijuana in the same way as cigarettes and alcohol.

The model is already being successfully rolled out in the US.

Five states have legalised recreational use of cannabis, most recently California this month.

And last year in Colorado alone, according to Time Magazine, \$2.39-billion (R33.4-billion) and 18 000 jobs were generated by taxing cannabis.

Pittaway, a full-time permaculture practitioner and part-time NMMU philosophy lecturer completing his philosophy PhD, said he felt strongly that the South African word "dagga" had become a pejorative word.

## Taxing sales can fund education, NMMU lecturer tells **Guy Rogers**

"Based on global trends, the use of the words 'marijuana' and 'cannabis' are far more useful in considering the growing acceptance of the positive effects of legalisation of the plant, its medical and industrial uses, and the tax revenue generated via its presence in society," he said.

The funds accrued from this new tax could be hugely useful, he said.

"It could easily solve the funding issues brought to the fore during the #FeesMustFall protests.

"And with the marijuana legalised for medicinal and recreational use, the plant's availability could also be capitalised on through various other projects in community empowerment, eco-tourism, alternative building materials, foods and textiles. That this door has not yet been opened is criminal."

The move to legalise cannabis seems to be on the upswing globally with 28 countries, from Belgium to Uruguay, having taken this step, ac-

cording to the New York-based Drug Policy Alliance.

In April, a leading strictly orthodox Haredi rabbi in Israel declared marijuana kosher for passover.

Pittaway said both the production and recreational use of marijuana could be taxed in line with successful systems already instituted elsewhere. Marijuana grown and sold for medical use would also be taxed but at a lower rate.

Faced with the challenges surrounding university funds, it would make sense to quickly decriminalise and legalise marijuana at the same time.

Given the precedent set by terminally ill Inkatha Freedom Party MP Mario Ambrosini, who in 2014 tabled a Medical Innovation Bill seeking to legalise the use of cannabis for medical purposes and beneficial commercial and industrial use, "none of this should come as a surprise to parliament", he said.

Pittaway said he had also en-

gaged with NMMU via an NMMU Trust member.

The member asked not to be named at this stage but told Pittaway he would be invited to fee funding discussions next year.

In the US, California's November 8 vote for full legalisation is being seen as possibly opening the floodgates to marijuana legalisation across the US.

Online site Business Insider has estimated that this could mean \$44-billion (R616-billion) of fresh revenue annually for the federal fiscus. It was impossible to estimate how much could be raised in South Africa but these figures should be considered, Pittaway said.

He urged readers to investigate to see the difference between "ideology about marijuana" and "facts about marijuana".

"People can then pressure their political representatives to take appropriate action towards legalisation and taxation."

Alcohol and cigarettes are legal despite the illnesses and deaths they cause, while cannabis is illegal at present although it has had no deaths directly associated with it, he argued.

"These are horrendous double standards that any reasonable person simply cannot support."

At the same time, in South Africa, medical marijuana is increasingly used and debated.

"Everyone talks about it now – grandparents, doctors, teachers. They have to because it is increasingly in the public eye and people have realised that the plant is not only harmless, it's a miracle medicine with different uses."

The #FeesMustFall funding crisis had to be seen against this background, he said.

"The business-as-usual model has not shown any ability to address the issues.

"Accordingly, people are concerned for the future of their chil-



**DAVID PITTAWAY**

dren, and for education in this country.

"This is a make-it or break-it moment. The legalisation and taxation of marijuana is something that is happening in real time, with a considerable number of global precedents, and certainly more countries and US states are set to get on board.

"This is how we can make it – and

generate revenue not just for education, but for all manner of social sectors."

NMMU spokesman Debbie Derry said the university was planning a series of engagements with staff, students and the broader NMMU community to build further on efforts already under way to find solutions for the financial issues affecting tertiary institutions.

She said NMMU was aware of Pittaway's proposal and had recommended that he should present it at the discussions planned for next year.

"There are many challenges facing higher education in general and NMMU would like to engage with all interested parties who have innovative solutions," she said.

"If the proposal around the legalisation and taxing of marijuana to fund higher education passes through the discussion processes . . . we will engage with it and formulate a position."

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