

## BIOGRAPHY OF CANNASSENTIALS MASTER GROWER SHANE BUDD



Photo: Caely Brandon

Shane Budd's title at Cannassentials – the sustainably operated cannabis-cultivation company he co-owns with his cousin and a longtime friend – is “Master Grower.” But he doesn't call himself a grower; he calls himself a farmer. This distinction asserts itself in nearly every aspect of his approach to Cannassentials' organic farm, situated near Eugene, Ore.

Chief among these is Budd's outlook on output. “We are not driven primarily by yield,” he confirms. “Our focus is the experience of our customers. What we provide to them is not merely an intoxicant; it's more like a fine wine – terroir, balance, complexity and structure all come into play. Yes, our cannabis is exceptionally potent, but it also maintains its aroma and flavor all the way down, burning cleanly with none of the harshness people have come to expect. It's a top-shelf specialty niche product sought out by the most discerning connoisseurs.”

The desire for Cannassentials' gourmet green is such that Budd and his partners are barely able to satisfy demand. It's not hard to see why. When a customer visits a dispensary and asks for the dankest of the dank, the budtender can feel confident recommending Cannassentials. When the shopper wants the most flavorful, most aromatic and (not coincidentally) most terpene-laden selection, the budtender is happy to suggest Cannassentials. When a consumer is looking for the flower grown with the most rigorous adherence to organic standards, the budtender need not ponder before proffering Cannassentials.

A veritable feast for the senses, Cannassentials' wares are the *ne plus ultra* of cannabis offerings. This is borne out not only by rapturous customer response but a first-place

finish in the Best Flower Nose (Medical) category at the 2016 Oregon Dope Cup, bestowed by the taste-making *Dope* magazine. At the GanjaCon GanjaCup, the company earned a *quintet* of first-place finishes, including honors for their 2015 and 2016 Sour Diesel. What's more, Cannassentials' entries earned these first-place finishes in the indoor, outdoor and greenhouse categories, an unprecedented feat for any farm.

How does this small family enterprise consistently achieve this level of excellence? Says Budd, "It's mostly the living soil – a biodynamic ecosystem full of microorganisms – doing what it does." His tone is matter-of-fact, but get him going, and the evangelist of "beyond organic" emerges, excited to discuss the ins and outs of feeding with plant ferments, composting waste and applying modern technology to ancient techniques. Moreover, he's keen to extol the virtues of a probiotic, closed-loop, regenerative system and has been known to exclaim, "Chemicals do not have terpenes!"

But before Budd was farming cannabis in climate-controlled greenhouses with supplemental lighting and computerized monitoring, he was tossing seeds into his mother's flower garden (though his mom has always been his #1 fan, she wasn't thrilled when her posies were overrun by pumpkins).

Shane Budd – "Budd" is his mother's maiden name, which he took for obvious reasons – was born in South Africa. His father's family, members of which fled Lithuania during World War II, settled in Johannesburg and launched a farm. "Dad was a factory farmer," Budd relates with a note of scorn. The operation boasted 10,000 acres of potatoes, 8,000 acres of corn, 100,000 head of cattle and 30,000 pigs. The biggest meat-producing farm south of the equator, it employed 3,000 people. "I was appalled by factory farming and its horrible practices," Budd states unequivocally. "My dad and I would argue about it. He'd always say, 'You can't grow things without chemicals.'" Given Budd's career path, it's reasonable to conclude that he took this as a challenge.

His mom, for her part, "told great stories of her own childhood on a farm, growing up in a house with no electricity or running water. Her father – Farmer Budd – could grow or build anything."

The family later moved to the New York City suburb of White Plains where, at 14, Budd began "hanging around with hippies," who influenced his thinking about food. This was reinforced when a teacher gave him a copy of John Robbins' landmark "Diet for a New America: How Your Food Choices Affect Your Health, Happiness and the Future of Life on Earth." It wasn't long before the precocious teen had "gone vegan."

The operative word being "teen" in that, despite his reading, he wasn't adequately minding his intake of protein and other nutrients critical to a healthy diet. Thus Budd became vitamin-deficient. "I was eating a lot of processed, empty foods, so I never really felt all that great," he concedes. "That's when my mom stepped in to teach me how to cook and generally take care of myself. I'm still very particular about what I put in my body."

By the time Budd was 16, he'd fallen under the sway of the Grateful Dead. "I wanted to travel," he says, "get out and see the country." When his family relocated to Florida, he took the opportunity to light out for the territories. Thus began a vagabond chapter that saw him take up residence in Maine for a year, where he "lived in a cabin a mile away from anything and started getting into whole foods."

In his early 20s, Budd put down roots in the area he's called home since 1999. "I first came to Eugene the summer I left Florida and ended up at the Oregon County Fair, which is a big part of the counterculture hippie movement here," he explains. "I was inspired by the lush beauty and likeminded people I met. In retrospect, it didn't hurt that the local community included some of the best cannabis growers in the world." He's particularly grateful to the folks at Dragon Earth Medicinals, who've graciously shared their secrets with him.

Budd had been an avid gardener for some time before relocating to outer Eugene, which moved him to return to the classroom. He took biology at the community college as a prerequisite to a subsequent botany course. "At some point I realized I wasn't giving my plants what they needed," he says. "The classes I took hammered home the similarity of the systems regulating the growth of plants and people. I'd learned how to supply *myself* with nutrients; I had to do the same with my garden."

He bought 28 acres and commenced farming certified-organic produce. This is when his near-obsessive standards of quality began to emerge. Bringing his artisanal, farm-to-table sensibility to cannabis felt like a natural progression; he frequently uses the word "tasty" to describe the fruits of his labor and has likened Cannassentials' flavorful flower to "a really amazing delicious organic carrot."

Budd's entry into the field, in 2006, was spurred by Oregon's legalization of medical marijuana, thus his commitment to the "cleanest," most effective possible product. He's dismayed that growers persist in using bottle food to produce plants whose end users are patients, grouching, "They use that crap because it's cheap." But he reserves his real outrage for the growers who rely on chemicals to meet their production quotas: "They use industrial-grade fertilizers loaded with heavy metals and sell the results as medicine!"

Budd, his wife, and their two young sons now live in a home he built on the farm. He works sunup to sundown and still manages to follow the Probiotic Farmers Alliance forum, thumb through the latest issue of Acres USA, and pore over books bearing such titles as "Teaming With Microbes: The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web" and "The Secret Life of Plants." Asked how he'll know when he's "made it," Budd reflects, "When we have self-sustaining systems in place that promote symbiosis and flow with abundance." No doubt his use of "abundance" here means quality as much as quantity.

— **Julia Rubiner, *The Herbal Verbalist***  
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