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Analyst: With U.S. mired in drug war, pot becomes top cash crop

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SEATTLE — Marijuana has become the biggest cash crop in the United States, bringing in more annually than corn and wheat combined, according to an analysis released last week by a public-policy researcher.

Jon Gettman, a Virginia-based researcher, wrote the report using government data.

It's among the top three cash crops in 30 states, Gettman said. He said the nation's five largest producers are California, Tennessee, Kentucky, Hawaii and Washington.

California's marijuana crop is worth an estimated \$13.8 billion.

Nationally, domestic marijuana production has increased 10 times over in the past 25 years, from 1,000 metric tons in 1981 to 10,000 metric tons in 2006, according to federal government estimates cited in the report.

Gettman's study argues that the U.S. is forfeiting millions in potential tax revenue every year by criminalizing marijuana.

Drug-enforcement officials say they aren't surprised by the estimates, but a regional enforcement agent worries that putting a dollar figure on the crop perpetuates a "fallacy" that marijuana represents a harmless tax windfall.

"You can look at anything being a cash crop if you don't want to make any conclusions about the damage it does," said Dave Rodriguez, the director of the Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, a Seattle-based division of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Gettman's report started with a widely used federal pot-production estimate that about 10,000 metric tons of marijuana are produced domestically every year. He divided that amount among the 50 states based on how much marijuana was seized in each state.

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