

Brazen pot growing operations moving into El Dorado County

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

SACRAMENTO — Amid dense scrub oak and manzanita high above the Coloma Valley in El Dorado County, the marijuana growers were stocked to subsist in the steep, unforgiving terrain.

They had seedlings, fertilizer and drip irrigation for thousands of high-grade plants. They had solar power, cookware and months of food. And they had a tiny, protective figurine: Jesús Malverde, the patron saint of Mexican drug traffickers.

With a month to go in the growing season, California is shattering records for pot seizures stemming from raids on illicit marijuana gardens. And authorities blame intricate Mexican drug networks that seek remote growing sites, supply and arm workers, and harvest and traffic the product.

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