

# **Job Losses Hit Mature Cannabis States as Emerging Markets Surge**

## **Despite \$30.1 Billion in Cannabis Revenue, U.S. Industry Sheds 15,000 Jobs in 2024 as Market Pressures Mount**

The U.S. regulated cannabis industry posted \$30.1 billion in revenue in 2024—an increase of 4.5% over the previous year—yet the sector saw a surprising contraction in its workforce. According to the newly released *U.S. Cannabis Jobs Report 2025* by staffing firm Vangst, overall employment fell by 3.4%, eliminating 15,000 jobs and reducing the total workforce to 425,000.

### **Price Compression, Oversupply, and High Taxes Prompt Job Cuts in Mature Cannabis Markets**

While headline revenue numbers suggest growth, deeper structural issues continue to plague mature cannabis markets. State and local tax burdens, market saturation, and continued price compression have forced many operators to cut costs and reduce headcounts.

Oversupply in states such as Oregon has led to falling prices and thinning margins, making it difficult for many businesses to remain profitable—let alone hire more staff. The report identifies California and Illinois as two of the hardest-hit states, with California losing nearly 4,000 jobs and Illinois experiencing a staggering 25% drop in cannabis employment.

### **Emerging Markets Like Maryland, New York, and Ohio Are Fueling Industry Job Growth**

In contrast, newer cannabis markets are injecting fresh energy into the national employment picture. States such as Maryland, New York, and Ohio are adding jobs rapidly as new licenses are issued and infrastructure is built out.

New York, in particular, saw a 209% surge in cannabis jobs following the approval of 743 new adult-use marijuana licenses. These newer markets are less encumbered by the tax and regulatory challenges that have slowed growth in more established states.

### **Salaries in the U.S. Cannabis Sector Outpace Canada by Up to 20%, Especially in Newer Markets**

While job numbers have declined in parts of the U.S., compensation trends remain strong—particularly when compared internationally. A separate report from Toronto-based White Ash Group found that U.S. cannabis salaries exceed those in Canada by as much as 20%, particularly in leadership and technical roles.

Leadership salaries in the U.S. have increased by 10%–15% year-over-year, particularly in high-demand states such as California and New York. These salaries are being bolstered not only by a higher cost of living but also by the perceived momentum and excitement of the U.S. cannabis market.

## **Coastal Markets See Divergent Salary Trends, With Equity Incentives More Common in the East**

Salary ranges vary widely by region. Western markets like California and Colorado continue to offer competitive base salaries, while newer East Coast markets such as New Jersey and New York increasingly offer equity packages to attract top talent.

For example:

- A master grower in California earns between \$95,000 and \$125,000, compared to \$75,000–\$95,000 in Colorado.
- Retail store managers in California command \$70,000–\$95,000 annually, whereas in Arizona, they earn \$55,000–\$75,000.
- Entry-level budtenders make \$17–\$23 per hour in California, versus \$15–\$18 in Colorado.

## **Canadian Cannabis Companies Focus on Global Expansion, Driving Demand for International Talent**

As domestic market growth slows, Canadian cannabis producers are increasingly pivoting toward international exports. This shift is driving demand for roles in international business development, with compensation packages adjusted for complex supply chains and regulatory variations.

Some Canadian companies are now focused entirely on growing cannabis for export, bypassing domestic sales altogether in favor of international markets where margins may be more favorable and competition less intense.

## **Industry Stabilizes in Established States While Emerging Markets and Global Strategies Drive New Opportunities**

The cannabis industry in North America is maturing—fast. While legacy markets recalibrate and confront financial headwinds, growth is clearly shifting toward newer state markets and international expansion strategies. For cannabis professionals and investors alike, the key to success lies in navigating this dynamic, multi-speed landscape.

Email: [info@cannabisriskmanager.com](mailto:info@cannabisriskmanager.com) | Phone: +415-226-4060

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