

Milestone in Cannabis Labor: One Strike Ends, Another Carries On

Longest Strike in U.S. Cannabis Industry Ends, But Separate Work Stoppage Continues

Pennsylvania Dispensary Workers Reach Agreement After 45 Days on Strike

What's believed to be the longest labor stoppage in U.S. cannabis industry history ended earlier this month at a RISE medical cannabis dispensary in York, Pennsylvania.

The strike, which began on Labor Day and lasted 45 days, concluded with what union organizers described as a victory for employees.

“We got our raise, we got our contract,” said John Stambaugh, a RISE patient care specialist and member of International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 776.

While specific contract terms weren't disclosed, Stambaugh said the new agreement includes a grievance procedure, improved paid holidays, and higher wages.

Green Thumb Industries, the Chicago-based parent company of RISE — did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Observers believe this marks the longest strike in the \$32 billion legal cannabis sector's short history, easily surpassing the previous record of a 13-day work stoppage that ended in May 2023.

A Separate Strike in Ohio Could Soon Surpass It

Even as the Pennsylvania strike concluded, another labor dispute could soon take its place in the record books.

Workers at the Columbus, Ohio, location of Herbal Wellness Center have been on strike since September 28 already surpassing the two-week mark that once stood as the industry's longest strike.

As of Wednesday, those employees remained on the picket line.

Both the RISE and Herbal Wellness workers are represented by the Teamsters, one of two major national unions organizing in the cannabis industry.

Ohio Workers Say Management Is “Failing to Bargain in Good Faith”

At Herbal Wellness, the dispute centers on stalled contract negotiations and what workers describe as management's unwillingness to engage.

Patton added that employees are seeking basic labor protections, job security, and fair pay.

The company, previously known as Strawberry Fields until it was acquired in 2023 by Vext Science, operates at least five cannabis retail locations in Ohio.

Vext did not respond to multiple requests for comment. A publicly listed phone number for CEO Eric Offenberger was disconnected.

Strikes Highlight Growing Labor Tensions in Cannabis Industry

Strikes remain rare in the cannabis sector, but the latest wave of worker actions points to mounting frustration across the industry.

According to Bloomberg Law, 75% of all U.S. strikes are resolved within two weeks, making both the York and Columbus walkouts outliers in their duration.

The timing also comes amid economic and political headwinds.

President Donald Trump's second administration, viewed as pro-business, has slowed labor board appointments, effectively hamstringing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) — the agency that often mediates labor disputes.

At the same time, cannabis operators in legacy markets are grappling with shrinking margins, falling wholesale prices, and competition from unregulated hemp-derived THC alternatives.

This combination makes it harder for workers to secure concessions — especially from companies already fighting to stay profitable.

Meanwhile, wage growth for low-income workers has begun to decline, according to Federal Reserve data, affecting thousands of cannabis retail and production employees who typically fall into that wage bracket.

Pennsylvania Strike Shows Strength of Cannabis Worker Solidarity

Both of the recent strikes have taken place in traditionally conservative states Pennsylvania and Ohio that nonetheless have deep union roots.

In York, Stambaugh said striking RISE employees received solidarity and material support from other union members, non-union cannabis workers, and even patients who refused to cross the picket line.

Ohio Workers Stand Firm Amid Economic Uncertainty

At the Columbus Herbal Wellness site, roughly 20 employees are participating in the strike.

Patton said the company's management practices including inconsistent pay raises, frequent firings, and favoritism motivated the walkout.

He added that new hires are now being paid \$16 per hour, down from \$18 per hour just a year ago.

Ohio's legal cannabis market, which launched adult-use sales in August 2024, is considered a growth opportunity for multistate operators like Vext Science.

Despite that optimism, workers say they felt they had no choice but to strike.

What's Next for Cannabis Labor Relations?

The recent strikes signal that organized labor is becoming a permanent fixture in cannabis particularly as the industry matures and workers push for long-term stability.

While the RISE victory may inspire more union drives, continued disputes like Herbal Wellness' show that the balance of power between employers and employees remains unsettled.

Whether 2025 brings more strikes or more cooperation could depend on how quickly cannabis companies learn what Stambaugh and his colleagues already discovered: that solidarity still has power even in America's newest industry.

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