

# AGGIE life

TUESDAY  
April 9, 1996

Page 3

## MARIJUANA

### Hemp use clouded by controversy

By Libe Goad and John LeBas  
THE BATTALION

Once farmers grew it under strict orders from the government. People paid their taxes with it. It was a major component of paper, money, cloth and rope. Benjamin Franklin used it to start one of the first American paper mills. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson grew plenty of it on their plantations.

It was a major cash crop for years, and its name is hemp.

*Cannabis sativa*, commonly known as marijuana, pot, weed, hemp, reefer, grass and ganja, was even grown in Texas A&M's back yard — Hempstead.

Marijuana use is illegal now, but some A&M students are keeping the "tradition" alive.

Smoking marijuana makes up a small portion of the marijuana question. Groups like the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws fight to end hemp's prohibition, but they exist in the minority.

The moral and legal questions surrounding this issue divide the campus into three groups: those who like it, those who hate it and those who would rather talk about other people's mothers.

Several A&M students and staff shared their views on the marijuana question.

Jason Mitchell, former NORML president and Class of '95, said pot use among A&M students is not necessarily on the rise.

"I think that there was a lot of talk about marijuana being glamorized over the past five years or so," Mitchell said.

He attributes this apparent rise in the drug's popularity to a greater level of honesty among those polled about marijuana use.

"I've seen studies showing an increase among high school students, but I think more people now admit it," he said.

Mitchell said marijuana use is not necessarily detrimental to school performance. As with any drug, he believes this is determined by a user's level of responsibility.

"Everybody's different," Mitchell said. "There are people who could use it every day and end up with a 4.0. Some people have been taught to be responsible by their parents (regarding drug use), while some people have never been taught that. But any addiction can be detrimental to performance."

Wade Greenwood, president of NORML and a freshman English major, said he believes marijuana use is pretty stable among A&M students, but users are now more open about smoking than they have been in the past.

"People are less afraid and don't hide it as much," he said. "I guess

people are realizing that it's not such a bad thing."

Greenwood said marijuana use has less of an impact on students' grades than alcohol does.

"Most people, when they picture people who use, think of people who just sit on their bed all day," he said. "I know more people who sit around and drink alcohol and screw up just as easily."

But drinking is legal — at least for the 21-and-up crowd — whereas marijuana use, possession and distribution remains against the law.

Greenwood said the benefits of marijuana are why most smokers support legalization.

"Most people want it to be legal so they can smoke without going to jail," he said. "At NORML, we emphasize the uses you can get from the plant itself — it's pretty beneficial."

Smoking is often "prescribed" for cancer and AIDS patients, and hemp is a durable material used in making clothes, shoes and even wallets.

But most smokers are willing to face the risks involved with using the drug, Greenwood said.

"The fact that it's illegal doesn't stop people from doing it," he said.

Statistics provided by the University Police Department support this statement.

Bob Wiatt, director of the UPD, said that between Sept. 1, 1995 and March 31 of this year, UPD made 21 marijuana-related arrests on campus.

**"There's no hard evidence, but we're coming into contact with it more, usually with younger people who apparently think that marijuana is a social drug and that it's not a violation."**

— BOB WIATT

director of University Police Department

Wiatt said he has observed an increase in marijuana use among students through these arrests and his work with the Brazos County Narcotics Task Force.

"There's no hard evidence, but we're coming into contact with it more, usually with younger people who apparently think that marijuana is a social drug and think it's not a violation," Wiatt said. "It's certainly not decreasing."

Wiatt said penalties for possession vary with the quantity. He said having even a few seeds is a misdemeanor offense, punishable by up to a year in jail and up to a \$4,000 fine.

"If you have a quantity, the presumption is that you're selling it, and it could escalate into a felony," Wiatt said.

Most of the arrests on campus since September were for possession of small quantities of the drug, indicating that those arrested were only interested in personal use.

But Wiatt stressed the dangers of the drug, even when used in such small amounts.

"First of all, it does alter the thinking process," he said. "A recent arrest was made after a UPD officer pulled over a driver who was at first thought to be drunk. As it turned out, the driver was high — and incarcerated."

Wiatt said students should not assume UPD officers will resort to leniency in marijuana incidents because they won't.

"If anyone out there is trying to see if law enforcement will be winking," he said, "that's a fallacy."

Officers and residence hall staff have been acquainted with the smell of burning weed, and they will not hesitate to bust smokers if the odor is detected.

"The main thing is that it is illegal, and whether or not people think it's a panacea, if they are caught with it, they will be charged with a criminal violation," Wiatt said. "The user should beware."

"Karl," a student who wishes to remain anonymous, said he will be cautious with weed in the future.

"I'm bitter on it because I was given

something laced last year," he said.

After a night of driving around smoking marijuana, Karl lost track of his whereabouts. Thirty minutes later, when he returned to reality, Karl found himself parked in front of Extreme.

He said he blacked out five times after he parked in front of the College Station dance club.

A friend took him home and watched him until the horror ended at 4 a.m.

Karl said he doesn't care when his friends smoke pot, and though he is disillusioned with the recreational drug, he would smoke it again.

"If I absolutely knew the person who was supplying it and I trusted them," he said. "There are only a few people right now that I trust about that."

### Not your NORML students

At a NORML meeting last Tuesday night, several members voiced their views on and concerns about marijuana issues.

Adviser Don Arnold, a longtime Bryan resident, said marijuana use is not a recent trend.

"I suspect use of marijuana on campus has been fairly constant since the '70s, which is when I was aware of it," he said.

Arnold said societal pressures keep him from using marijuana for medicinal purposes.

"I need to try to use it for my glaucoma, but I don't because of my job,

and I have a daughter," he said. "You want to be able to stand up for it, but you can't. I think we struggle with the concept of responsible use."

NORML members say government and the media usually portray marijuana as a violent drug, often grouping the drug with substances such as cocaine, LSD and heroin.

Marijuana research has been stifled as a result, they said. Laws regarding marijuana render the drug illegal because it has no medical value, a claim NORML members dispute.

Studies show marijuana can be used to treat the disabling pressure of glaucoma and the pain of migraine headaches. The drug also increases the appetite of AIDS and cancer patients, eases the side effects of chemotherapy and is an ideal anorexia treatment.

Pharmaceutical companies have given millions of dollars to the drug war efforts because marijuana can be used as so many different medicines, and these companies would lose a lot of money if the drug was legalized, NORML members said.

Yet, in anticipation of legalization, several tobacco companies have already obtained trademarks for future marijuana cigarette brand names.

If marijuana was legalized, NORML members said, the hemp industry could produce cooking oil, paint, paper, cheap and environment-friendly fuel, clothes and even plastic, as well as medicines.

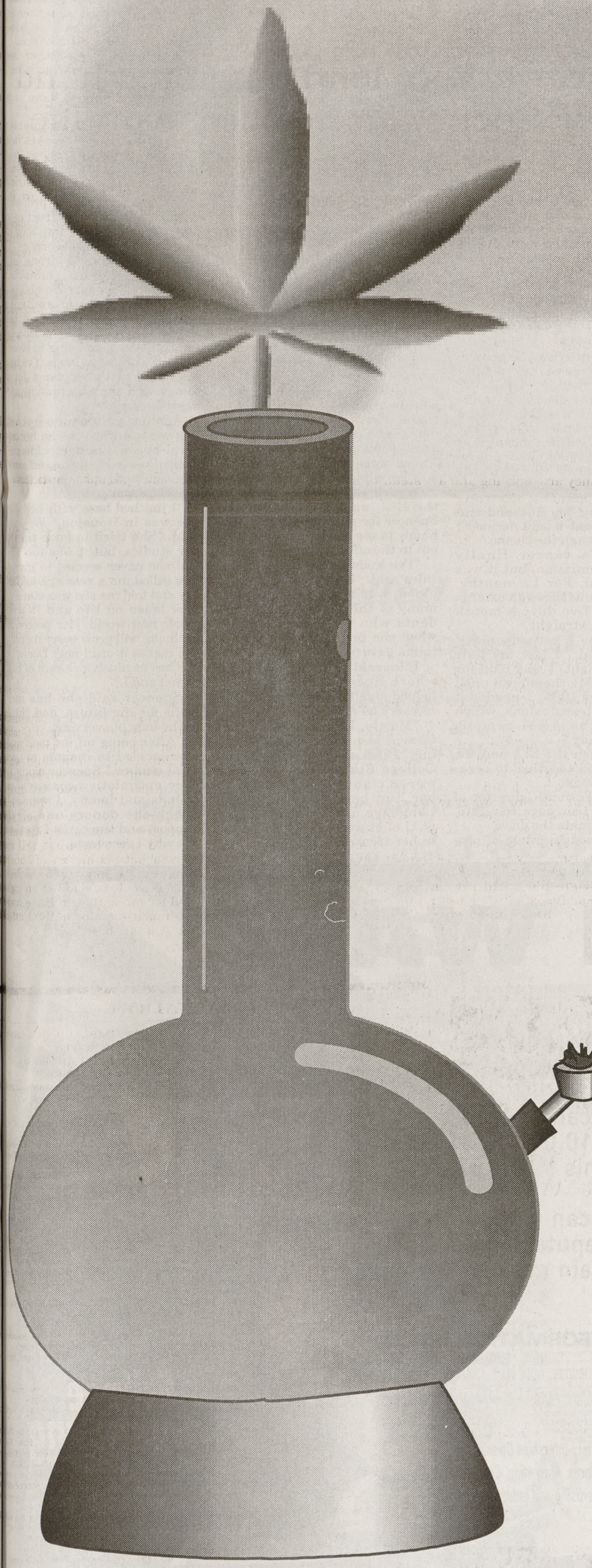
After all, marijuana was, at one time, quite legal and widely utilized.

In 1937, hemp was declared by Mechanical Engineering magazine to be "the most profitable and desirable crop that can be grown." Farmers were once prohibited from refusing to grow hemp, because of its value as a cash crop.

### The tight-lipped majority

People who refrain from smoking marijuana can easily avoid the drug at A&M. The conservative atmos-

See Marijuana, Page 4



for  
urses  
ups  
son said.  
the structure of  
roup varies with  
discussion usually  
concepts and the  
that week.  
aid that along  
ideas and prob-  
strategies, he  
sics study group  
ns.  
way to learn  
."  
ANDON SUCHER  
SI leader  
ics or any other  
l course, you have  
blems or you don't  
do," Walker said.  
chemistry 101 see  
said he makes up  
ems and test ques-  
ves mock exams.  
strategy Sucher uses  
dents explain one  
group members.  
way to learn is to  
d.  
each semester  
ers take part in a  
ning session on  
e Center for Acad-  
ncement. During  
leaders learn in-  
strategies.  
aid many students  
'C's on their first  
er the semester  
er participating in  
up.  
being a success-  
e said, is listening  
s and finding out  
ke to do and what  
earn.  
dents know what  
nd the only way to  
to listen and ask  
M started the S  
992, it included out-  
sections. The pro-  
panded to 52 courses  
9,000 participants  
e terms  
d when outside  
o sex offender treat-  
x offender programs  
h, Rodriguez said.  
een placed in a  
olating or being seen  
f their release. He  
e 24-hour a day  
before.  
ed from a psychia-  
ly managed Center  
y. He arrived about  
s, a gray and white  
xpression. He didn't  
y was escorted inside  
er lock and key  
24-hour surveillance  
monitor on his side  
, he must tell  
is history of alterca-  
contact with children  
six years of an ag-  
atory release  
ed for a 1989 alter-  
boy.  
NOT, NIGHT News  
AGGIE LIFE EDITOR  
DIS, SPORTS EDITOR  
RADIO EDITOR  
VANICH, GRAPHICS  
GRAPHICS EDITOR  
is, Pamela Benson, Har-  
leather Pace, Danielle  
Tauma Wiggins  
Chel Barry, Kristina  
Faber, James Francis  
wift, & Alex Walters  
fin, Stephanie Christo-  
DESIGNER: Jody Hult  
L. Baxter, Rob Clark  
erson, Elaine Mejia, O-  
aldez & Kieran Watson  
: Rony Angkriwan, M-  
ruve, Cory Willis &  
ristin DeLuca, Jody H-  
on  
win, John Lemons, James  
ineyard & Chris Yang  
adaway, Mandy Cal-  
or  
at Texas A&M University  
tment of Journalism  
m phone: 845-3113  
hip or endorsement by  
rtising, call 845-3113  
s are in OES Reed Aca-  
gh Friday. Fax: 845-3113  
A&M student to pick up  
semester, \$40 per school  
discover or American Ex-  
rough Friday during the  
ring the summer session  
as A&M University  
Donald Building, Texa-