

Harvest at NETA

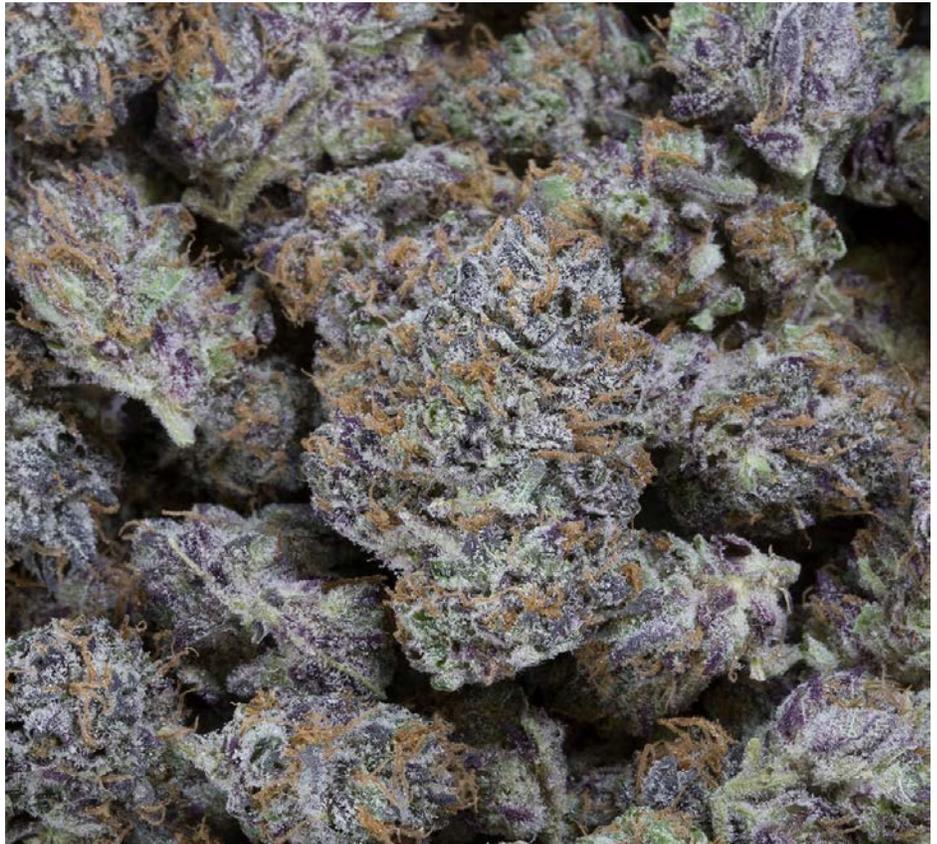
The top-of-the-line cannabis therapies produced by NETA do not happen by accident.

They are the result of the employees' meticulous attention to detail and the continuous refinement of the processes.

At any given time, NETA is tending to the thousands of marijuana plants cultivated inside its state-of-the-art production and processing facility in Franklin, MA.

All stages of the plant's life cycle are continually represented – from newly cut clones to mature flowering plants. Why is this important? It means everyday there is a Harvest.

To ensure a premium final product, NETA adheres to rigorous standards along each step of the growing process – constantly inspecting each plant. As the flowers bloom on the plant, employees conduct numerous pre-harvest inspections to track trichome development and plant structure. This careful process is repeated every five days. Upon harvest, every plant is subjected to yet another quality control check when employees break down and defoliate each plant by hand.



A fresh harvest of Hurricane.

Matt Lowther, NETA's harvest manager, has trained his employees to inspect each plant carefully. "Our focus is delivering a product that is safe for our patients by meeting all the state's requirements and NETA's own high standards for quality," Lowther said. Recalling to mind one of the three pillars of NETA's mission, Lowther also says, "If we see any issues, we will throw away the plant – it's the right thing to do."

After the plants are harvested and have undergone an initial trimming, they are transferred to the cure room where they slowly dry for up to two weeks. Once dried, trimmers manicure and then place them in air tight containers for further curing. Cleanliness remains a priority through this process and all employees who handle marijuana are required to dress in sterile uniforms, masks, and gloves.



GSC in the cure room.

Eamon Travers, vice president at CDX Analytics in Salem, said his company – which tests NETA’s products – has established one of the most sophisticated testing facilities in the country. “Our highly-valued staff continue to design and implement superior testing methods with one goal in mind – to ensure that our valued customers such as New England Treatment Access can provide the safest possible medical marijuana to sick and often immunocompromised patients. Patient safety must always be the industry’s focus and number-one priority,” he said.

To prevent any possible contamination of finished product, facility cleanliness is also of paramount importance. Inside the trim room, the walls, ceiling, ducting, and tables are subject to daily sanitization. Twice weekly, this same infrastructure undergoes a deep cleaning that utilizes biodegradable phosphate and solvent-free degreasers. Trimming shears are soaked daily in isopropyl alcohol, and storage trays are scrubbed every day with degreaser and then sanitized. This attention to detail does not end with visible surfaces – scrubbing the air in the facility is just as important. NETA has installed HEPA air filtration units in each cultivation, trim, and cure room.

After the flower has been manicured, it is transferred to the vault-like secure storage area. Here the flower is prepared for transport to an independent, off-site lab for comprehensive quality-control testing.

This is a methodical process, with safety, cleanliness, and security protocols that rival those of a hospital operating room. Approximately 5 grams of each flower strain are selected via a state-mandated process mirroring those used in the pharmaceutical industry to guarantee that a random, homogenous sample is taken. “We take the security and overall process of the lab sampling procedures very seriously. After collecting and weighing samples, placing them in sanitized containers and wrapping with tamper-proof tape, we place them into a lockable case,” said Eddie Benjamin, NETA’s director of innovation.

This attention to detail carries over into the transportation of these samples. “We have a special set of locks in our transportation vehicles that can only be opened by the specialists who are preparing the samples and by the lab technicians. Our routes and times for sample transport are randomized.

We have cameras on the inside of the van watching the locked cases, as well as on the outside of the vans. A custom built secure metal cage inside the van also protects the locked cases. Our drivers are wearing body cameras and communicate with headquarters every 15 minutes. The entire time, the vehicles are being tracked in real time on GPS and on camera,” said Benjamin.

NETA also tests the labs themselves for accuracy. “At times, we’ll send two of the same sample to two different labs to ensure the results are consistent – they usually are, within an acceptable margin – and for every 20 tests, we send a blind sample of a product for which we have already received results. This is the case for both flowers and marijuana infused products. This procedure makes sure the labs’ equipment is properly calibrated; and just as important it ensures the highest quality product is reaching our patients,” said Benjamin.

Lab results take about 5 to 7 days to process, and NETA’s passing rate is 99 percent. The one percent or so of samples that do not pass are evidence that the regulatory system is working. Says Eddie Benjamin, “Even with the time, resources, and effort we spend to cultivate only the best medical marijuana, we are still dealing with plants. Inevitably there will be an issue. Between NETA’s own thorough protocols and the extensive requirements put in place by the state, we believe that patients only receive the safest medicine available.”

The intention and effort behind every action at NETA is to deliver the highest quality products through compassionate service to our patients while respecting their individuality and protecting their privacy. The processes are detailed and the steps are many, but all are necessary parts of the equation that result in NETA achieving that goal.