

County leads state in marijuana arrests

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County may be little, but it was No. 1 in at least one thing last year.

Marijuana busts.

Despite our status as the state's second smallest county, Santa Cruz led the pack with 142 pot busts in 1993, according to a report by the county Sheriff's Office.

"This demonstrates the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office commitment to

suppressing the marijuana producers and sellers within its boundaries," said the report, which asks state officials for a \$15,000 grant to continue the fight this year. The Board of Supervisors is required to approve the grant first, and is set to consider it Tuesday.

Santa Cruz is also listed among the top counties in plant count and gross weight, the report says, thanks to its mountainous terrain and mild climate.

The report is part of the Sheriff's Office yearly request for state marijuana-

fighting funds. This year, deputies are asking for \$15,000 to help them eradicate marijuana gardens.

Most of the money would be used to pay deputies' overtime wages for their work on the raids.

However, \$1,000 of the money would be earmarked for confidential funds. Confidential funds, according to the report, can be used to pay informants for information, or to buy drugs, guns or stolen property related to a crime. The money can also be spent to create the

appearance of affluence by leasing apartments, business fronts, or luxury-type cars, planes or boats. Meals, beverages and entertainment expenses, within reasonable limits, are also legitimate uses of the confidential money.

If they receive the grant, deputies say they expect to eradicate at least 5,000 marijuana plants this year, including at least 15 indoor growing operations. They estimate they will arrest at least 85 marijuana growers/sellers, and prosecute 60 of them.