

Costs rising for county pot farmers

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SANTA CRUZ — The sheriff's office is billing county marijuana farmers for the cost of raiding their fields.

Lt. Phil Kirkland announced today that the department has begun sending itemized bills to pot farmers. And, Kirkland says, the first payment has been remitted.

"The bills include the cost of aerial surveillance, deputies' salaries, U-Haul trucks to haul away the marijuana and diesel oil for burning it," Kirkland explained. The first payment received, he said, was a check for \$1,453.

While the sheriff's office sends out the bills, it is up to the courts to order payment as it does restitution in other crimes.

Last year, sheriff's narcotics agents confiscated some \$20 million worth of sinemilla marijuana. Just the known amount grown puts pot second behind strawberries on the county's agricultural products list.

Another new law allows law enforcement agencies to seize any money found during raids as well as vehicles used in the cultivation or transportation of the pot.

In a raid in Bonny Doon on Tuesday, sheriff's narcotics agents seized \$64,000 cash from a home in Bonny Doon, where they also confiscated six pounds of marijuana.

Kirkland also announced that the 1984 sinsemilla eradication program is under way in the county. Agents, he said, already are watching as cultivation sites are being cleared, water lines are being laid and attempts made to camouflage the acreage for this year's crop.