



Where I work Sérgio Rocha

Photographed by Washington
Alves/Reuters/Alamy.

In this picture, I'm trying to work out which cannabis plants grow the fastest. I'm looking for those that have started to flower early, indicating that their reproductive organs have become active. My team and I can then cross-breed them for genetic improvement.

We have a 100-square-metre greenhouse at Brazil's Federal University of Viçosa. Growing cannabis for medical purposes is legal in Brazil, but only a few projects have been authorized. ADWA Cannabis, our company, is allowed to cultivate cannabis for research purposes here on campus – but we cannot expand beyond the university. Soon, we plan to open a new greenhouse, still on campus, three times bigger than this one.

Around 2015, when I started my bachelor's degree at Viçosa, the restrictive cannabis laws prompted nationwide protests – promoted mainly by mothers of kids with disorders such as epilepsy, who might benefit from drugs made from cannabis compounds but struggle to access them. Now, the Brazilian congress is considering making cannabis cultivation for medical

and industrial purposes fully legal. Brazil would then probably attract investment from countries including Canada and the United States, which have expertise in cannabis products. We hope that Brazilian companies can also carve out a space in this market.

When my partners and I founded ADWA Cannabis in 2018, we had only four subspecies of plant. After generations of cross-breeding, we are now evaluating 38 possible new varieties. Ultimately, our goal is to create plants that are completely comfortable in Brazilian soil and weather.

Besides the genetic improvement, we focus on monitoring the cultivation process, from soil nutrition to lighting and pest control. For this, we've developed software that has attracted the interest of Uruguayan and Spanish cannabis companies. We hope to license this software to more countries where cannabis cultivation is legal.

Sérgio Rocha is an agronomist engineer and executive director of ADWA Cannabis in Viçosa, Brazil. **Interview by Patrícia Maia Noronha.**