

Q&A with Susan Bunce, President of DB Labs Certified in Nevada for Cannabis Testing to meet the Industry Needs for Producing Safe Products



Susan Bunce
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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: Ms. Bunce, what is the vision at DB Labs today?

Ms. Bunce: Our vision is to provide safe cannabis products to the consumer. While also expanding DB Labs into other states and countries.

CEOCFO: How do you do so?

Ms. Bunce: We have highly specialized instrumentation and we have rigorous testing that the state of Nevada has set forth for us with

specific guidelines that we need to follow in order to have these products pass. If they do not pass they are not able to be sold in the dispensary. Therefore, they go through all of this testing before hand and then the client, which is the cultivator who has the flower or producer of the edibles and oils; receives a certificate so they can sell their products in a dispensary.

CEOCFO: Was DB Labs the first cannabis lab certified for testing in Nevada?

Ms. Bunce: Yes. We were the first lab to receive our license and open. We were the first lab to test in Nevada. We are also the first lab in Las Vegas to receive our ISO/IEC 17025:2005 accreditation from PJLA. We have also been awarded the Emerald Scientific Proficiency Testing. We have earned four Emerald badges. Emerald Scientific is a third party company that provides round robin tests nationwide. They send these tests out to laboratories that want to participate. If a laboratory falls within one standard deviation from the target value then badges are awarded showing the laboratory is right on target. If you are a little bit outside the parameters then your company is just given a "pass" and you do not actually get the badge. Those tests are only done twice a year; in the spring and in the fall.

CEOCFO: Are people looking for quality testing or is it just more discerning people that pay attention to your accomplishments?

Ms. Bunce: The market is still new here. I think that they just kind of take it for granted. Even people coming from other states do not realize the amount of testing that we do, because Nevada does have the most stringent testing in the nation compared to some other states. Such as, Arizona who does not require any testing at all. I know that they do some testing, which was just for cannabinoids and Terpenes, but that does not have anything to do as far as patient safety in regards to microbial contamination, heavy metals, pesticides or residual solvents, which could be very harmful to someone. Especially with a low immune system.

CEOCFO: *What do you find when you are testing? Is it typical that there are issues? What is the range of results?*

Ms. Bunce: Typically, most products are passing. I would say that the biggest problem for Nevada, in regards to testing, is microbial contamination. In many cases the cultivators have the individual master growers who come in from other states and have been growing for a number of years in those states very successfully. However, Nevada has set forth some very stringent limits and they are not used to the rigorous testing that we have, especially for the microbial limits. Therefore, sometimes they use products that make it more difficult for them to pass that microbial test.

CEOCFO: *What is involved in the testing? Are there standard tests? Are there different types of equipment?*

Ms. Bunce: We do have different types of equipment to conduct the myriad of testing. For our pesticides we have a Waters triple quad, which is an LC and GC, so that is a liquid chromatography and a gas chromatography that connect to a transducer. We have an ICPMS to do the heavy metals testing and we use agar plating and 3M petri film for all of our different microbial testing. We have a GCMS and an HPLC for the cannabinoid and terpene testing.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach out to potential new customers? If people are looking, how does DB Labs jump off the page?*

Ms. Bunce: I think that hopefully they are looking for a high quality laboratory to align themselves with, because they are required to have testing done before they can sell their product. However, I think what separates us from other laboratories is our rigorous quality control, which my sister-in-law, Stacy Gardalen, is our QC manager. She has been in the environmental world for about twenty years, she has carried over that kind of rigorous background coming into this industry. Therefore, we strive to continue our very high quality control and I do not know if other laboratories do that for their clients and the safety of the consumer. For every nine samples that we do we have a quality control check, which is to make sure that our instrumentation still falls within our specific guidelines to make sure that nothing is out of parameter or that something is not going wrong with the instrumentation. We have her and we also have, as I stated before, our ISO/IEC 17025 2005 accreditation, which no other laboratory has in Las Vegas. There is one other lab in Northern Nevada which has gotten theirs as well. Another thing that separates us from other labs is that we are a majority women owned and majority family owned business. Therefore we, as the owners, are very involved in this business. We take tremendous pride in what we do here and making sure that we have quality testing go out and to make sure that the consumers are safe. Perhaps we could say something here about Grow for Vets as well.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about plant sexing and your DNA sequencing service?*

Ms. Bunce: That is a service that we provide, but it is something we are unable to do in house at this time. It is something that we are looking at doing in the very near future.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*

Ms. Bunce: Business is going quite well. Since July 1, 2017 recreational consumption was made legal in Nevada and business has been quite well and getting better every day. We are very excited about what lies ahead for DB Labs.

CEOCFO: *Are you able to handle increased requests for testing? Do you need to get extra equipment, get more people or is it pretty straight forward and you can go a long time without having to make changes?*

Ms. Bunce: You know, we actually have been ramping up with all of that over the last few months in anticipation of the recreational market increasing. Therefore, we have added staff and we have already purchased additional instrumentation to make sure that there is not any lag time for the customer to have to wait a longer period of time for their results. We always get our tests out in forty eight or seventy two hours, depending upon what the product is. We are definitely ramping up in all of those areas to ensure the quality for our customers.

CEOCFO: *As the machinery and the test results come out, is there interpretation needed?*

Ms. Bunce: Yes and No. Once the instrument is set up and calibrated correctly, much of the data comes out in a standard way with little room for interpretation. However, it requires highly skilled operators to understand the instrumentation and to recognize whether the data is valid or when something looks unusual. This is a complex plant with many substances present, combined with multiple customers performing extractions and producing products by various methods. This can lead to unexpected variations in the finished product, and it takes a skilled chemist to be able to recognize when this happens. The ISO/IEC 17025:2005 accreditation, which is a third-party that comes in to ensure that the laboratory is performing each test in a consistent manner, helps to ensure good laboratory practices to be able to do this.

CEOCFO: *Is there much new in equipment for testing or is it pretty standard, tried and true?*

Ms. Bunce: I believe it is pretty standard, tried and true.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in how you approach the business, the nature of the business and the market?*

Ms. Bunce: In regards to now as opposed to when we started? We have had to keep up with the regulations, as there have been several changes that the state has made, that we've had to adjust and increase testing. However, there are some things that we have had to change in house just because of the states regulations.

CEOCFO: *Are there other items that you think should be tested for that the state has not come upon yet or do you see any of the items you do test for as not really necessary? Do you think the state has it right?*

Ms. Bunce: I think that for the most part the state does have it right. I do believe that they would benefit in talking more with the laboratories. They are talking with us, but I think they need to gain a better understanding of maybe certain pesticides that we are testing for, because they took a lot of information from the Department of Agriculture. They look at the food side of it and some of those pesticides which are used on the food are not used in cannabis. Therefore, I think that there may be some pesticides that could be removed or limits that are in parts per billion could be increased.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned being able to turn around results quickly. How else do you provide customer service for your clients? How are you able to help them with challenges or concerns they might not fully understand?*

Ms. Bunce: We have got amazing chemists that know their business. We are fortunate to have Ben Chew PhD, Kelly Zaugg, Glen Marquez and Kevin Alberto. Just to name a few members of our staff. DB Labs has also acquired our environmental license, so if there is a customer that needs our services, we can go in and we can do air samples, or swabs anywhere in the facility that they want. We can take all kinds of different samples to try and pinpoint specifically where their issue might be originating from. We can test their soil, their water and even their nutrients.

CEOCFO: *What is ahead for DB Labs?*

Ms. Bunce: I see us expanding our laboratory here in Las Vegas to accommodate more and more cultivation and production facilities as they come online and as business increases for the ones who are already doing business with us. I know that not all of them have reached their full capacity in the current buildings that they are in, so they are expanding as the industry is growing and we want to be able to do the same. However, we have also been approached by other laboratories/individuals in other states that would like to have the DB Labs name and support in getting them up and running. Therefore, we are also looking at expanding into other states and countries.

CEOCFO: *Are you seeking funding or partnerships or investment as you look to expand?*

Ms. Bunce: Yes.

CEOCFO: *Why choose DB Labs?*

Ms. Bunce: I think that they would choose DB Labs because we are known as the lab with the most integrity. We are not going to cut corners. We would be a true partner and want to be able to help them in any way, but also with knowing that there are certain parameters that we need to stay within, with the regulatory limits that the state has set forth. Therefore, they would have to be able to pass, but we want to be able to help them as well.

