

## Spain village votes on plan to rent land to grow cannabis

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The Spanish village of Rasquera voted Tuesday on a plan to rent out a field for growing cannabis in an urgent bid to create jobs and raise money to pay off its debts.

Rasquera's village council on February 29 approved the plan to rent seven hectares (17 acres) of public land to an association that promotes the legal recreational or therapeutic use of cannabis by its 5,000 members in a 4-3 vote.

But since the plan was met with fierce opposition from some residents and opposition parties who fear it will turn the village located 140 kilometres (90 miles) south of Barcelona into a drugs mecca, the council agreed to put it to a referendum.

A total of 804 residents were eligible to cast ballots in the referendum which posed the question: "Do you agree with the anti-crisis plan approved by the Rasquera town hall on February 29?".

Results will be announced after the polls close at 9:00 pm (1900 GMT) on Tuesday.

Private consumption of cannabis is not outlawed in Spain although it is illegal to sell the drug.

Rasquera, where local produce traditionally includes olives and grapes, is suffering from the country's severe public financing crisis and hopes

income from letting the land will help it pay down its 1.3 million euros (\$1.7 million) of debt.

The village council, controlled by a pro-Catalan independence party, says the plan would create 40 direct and indirect jobs, mostly involving the harvesting of the cannabis crop.

It argues the field can be rented to the Barcelona Personal Use Cannabis Association (ABCDA) for over 10 times the regular market price.

The Barcelona-based cannabis smokers' association will reportedly pay the village 650,000 euros a year for the right to grow its annual supply there.

Mayor Bernat Pellisa has said he will resign along with the rest of the village council if the proposal is not backed by 75 percent of eligible voters.

"The village, like so many others, has many difficulties, a big crisis, a lot of inhabitants without work," said Rasquera economic councillor Josep Maria Insausti.

"Now we are being asked to pay off our debts impossibly quickly for a small village."

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