

MARIJUANA CROSSROADS: Nebraska Law Enforcement on Trends in Drug Trafficking

Research prepared by NET News in cooperation with
The Nebraska County Attorneys Association
The Nebraska Sheriffs' Association



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November 12, 2013
netNebraska.org/marijuana



SUMMARY

Early in 2013 NET News launched an investigative reporting project to examine what, if any, impact Nebraska faced from the legalization of marijuana in the neighboring state of Colorado. We quickly learned there was little substantive data publicly available tracking trends in law enforcement.

In response, NET News proceeded to assemble and analyze data with the goal of answering two fundamental questions:

What does arrest data from reporting counties reveal about the total number of cases, the location of the cases, the severity of the offenses, and the trends since medical marijuana was made widely available in Colorado? This research was accomplished using county level data provided by the Nebraska Crime Commission and not previously released publicly. (For results see Appendix A)

What are the perceptions of local law enforcement agencies about the trends, impact and appropriate response in Nebraska to the increase in legally available marijuana from other states? This answer was ascertained through surveys developed by NET's research manager in cooperation with the Nebraska Sheriffs' Association and the Nebraska County Attorneys Association.

Results of the survey of county law enforcement officials are attached. Key findings include:

- Statewide, 66 percent of the county law enforcement officials surveyed felt legalization of medical marijuana in Colorado impacted the illegal drug trade in their region. The increased impact rose to 82 percent for officials serving along the I-80 corridor.
- With recreational marijuana becoming legal in Colorado in 2014, nearly 80 percent of county law enforcement officials surveyed statewide felt it would increase the supply of marijuana in their jurisdiction.
- Seventy percent of county law enforcement officials on the I-80 corridor surveyed by NET reported an "upward trend" in the number of arrests of those suspected of transporting marijuana through their county.
- Statewide, 89 percent of county law enforcement officials surveyed agreed that traffic stops along the Interstate were an effective way to reduce the marijuana supply in the state.
- Fifty-eight percent of law enforcement officials interviewed statewide agreed the Nebraska State Legislature should discuss a proposal to increase penalties for intent to deliver marijuana
- Sixty percent of county attorneys and 55 percent of county sheriffs located along I-80 said prosecuting/investigating marijuana cases had an impact on the county's budget.

Information from these surveys (Copyright NET News 2013) have been used to help inform the NET News documentary *Marijuana Crossroads*, first airing on NET1 Television Friday, November 22 at 7:00 PM (Central) and three NET News stories airing on NET Radio beginning Wednesday, November 20. Additional information and reporting is also available at netNebraska.org/marijuana.

NET News would like to thank the staff and membership of the Nebraska County Attorneys Association and the Nebraska County Sheriffs' Association for their participation in this fact-finding effort. Seventy members between the two organizations responded to the survey.

MARIJUANA CROSSROADS
Nebraska Law Enforcement on Trends in Drug Trafficking
Survey Results
November 12, 2013

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This study was a brief survey designed to collect the opinions of members of the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association and Nebraska County Attorneys Association regarding the impact of legalization of medicinal marijuana in Colorado and the impending legalization of marijuana in Colorado in January 2014, on law enforcement in Nebraska counties. This study was carried out with the cooperation of the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association and the Nebraska County Attorneys Association.

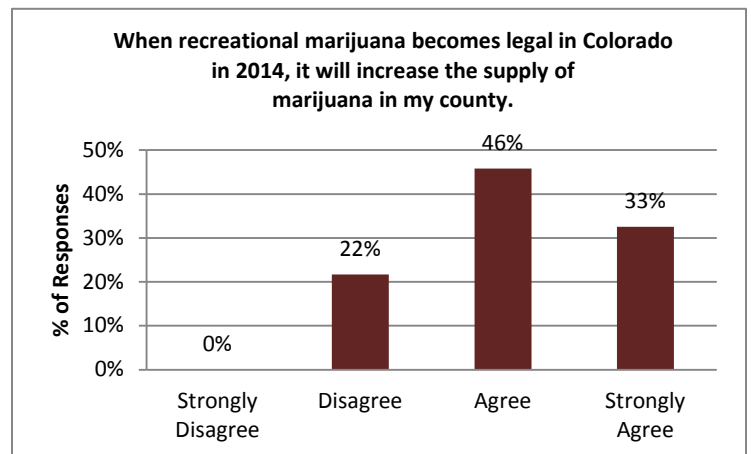
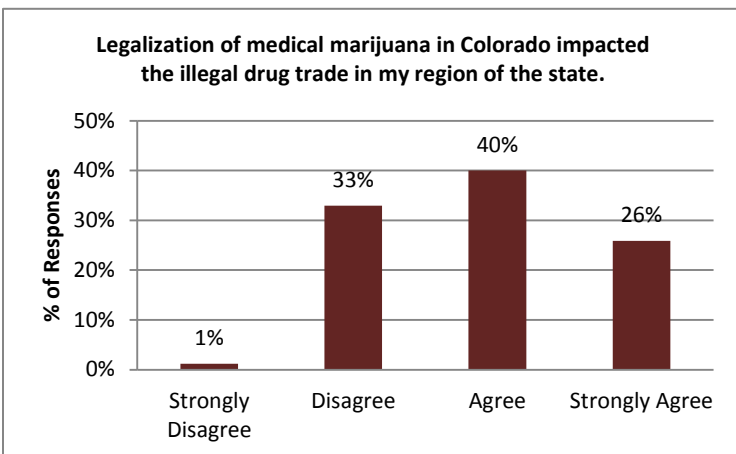
This survey was intended to collect data on the opinions of law enforcement officers and county attorneys at the county level. The data analysis was used to provide insight for the production of an NET News documentary. This data is being shared with the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association and the Nebraska County Attorneys Association.

The initial invitation to participate was sent out via email to members of the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association and Nebraska County Attorneys Association. The email included a link to the online survey. After a period of three weeks, follow-up phone calls were made to the sheriff offices and county attorney offices in counties that had not responded.

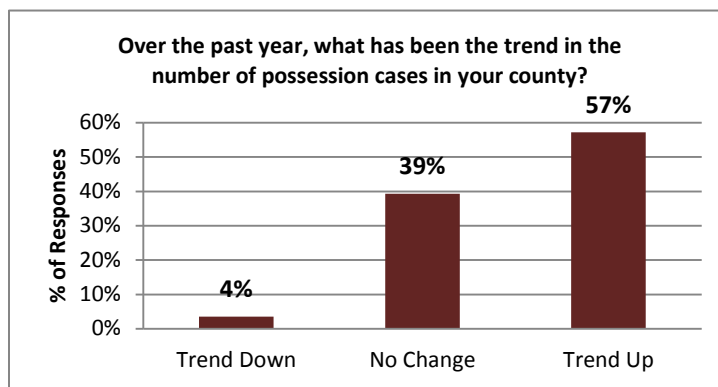
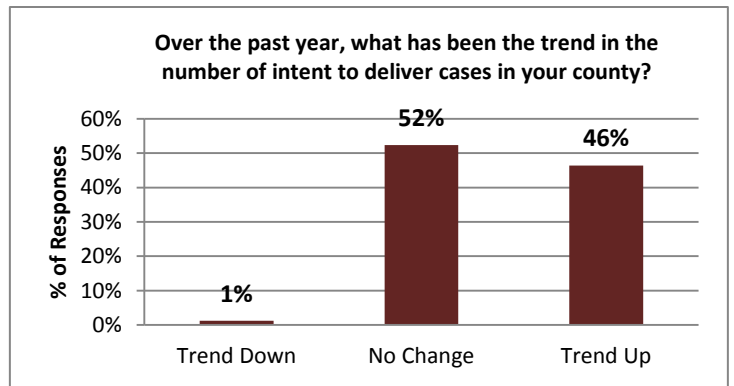
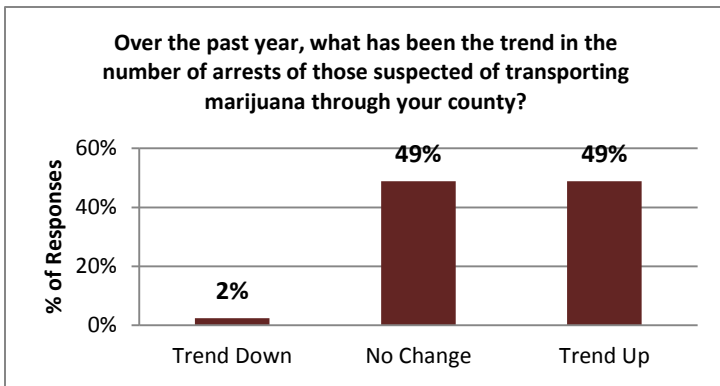
Overall, 54 percent of Nebraska counties returned a response from either their sheriff’s office or county attorney office or both offices. Seventy members in all between the two organizations responded to the survey representing 51 of Nebraska’s 93 counties. Any member of either organization was eligible to respond to the survey.

Respondents were asked two questions regarding the legalization of marijuana in Colorado. When asked about how legalization of medical marijuana impacted illegal drug trade in their region of the state, 66 percent agreed the legalization of medical marijuana had impacted illegal drug trade in their region. Yet 34 percent had not seen an impact in their region.

Looking ahead to the legalization of recreational marijuana in Colorado in 2014, 79 percent of respondents agreed the marijuana supply in their county would increase.

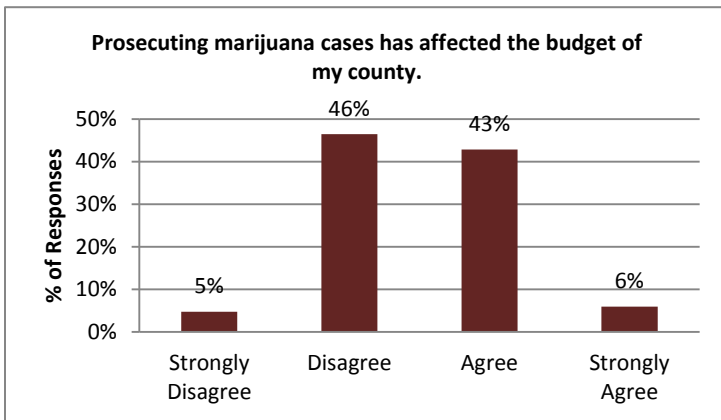
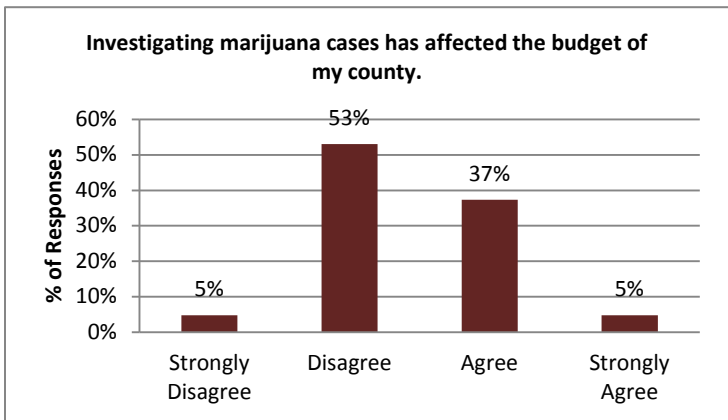


Examining marijuana arrest trends in Nebraska over the past year, there appears to be an upward trend in marijuana-related arrests. Transporting marijuana cases trended upward 49 percent, intent to deliver cases 46 percent and possession cases 57 percent.



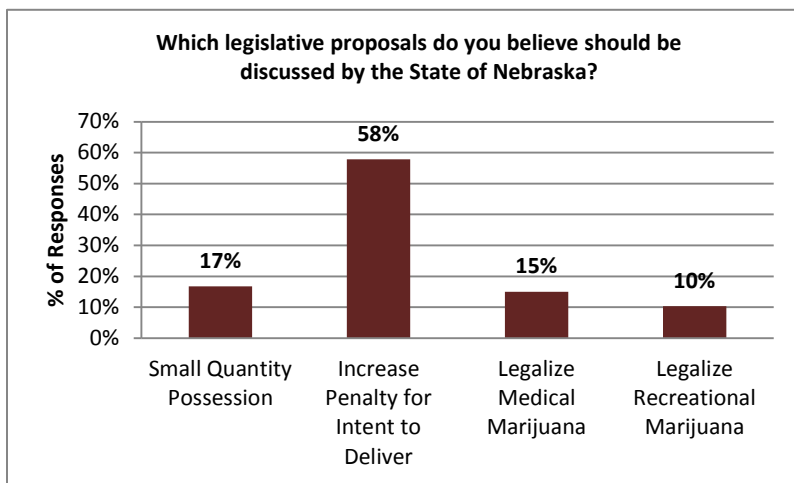
When respondents were asked about how the investigation and prosecution of marijuana cases had affected their budgets, there wasn't a clear answer. Investigating marijuana cases seemed to have less of an impact on county budgets according to survey respondents (58 percent disagreed it created a budget impact, 42 percent agreed it created a budget impact). While opinions regarding prosecuting marijuana cases were split nearly evenly among respondents (51 percent disagreed it created a budget impact, 49 percent agreed it created a budget impact).

There may be several contributing factors to these results, such as county proximity to drug corridors, actual budget size, and the perspective of the survey respondent depending on their role in the investigation and prosecution process. The fact of the matter is there is a significant number of survey respondents who are seeing an impact on their budgets due to the investigation and prosecution of marijuana cases.

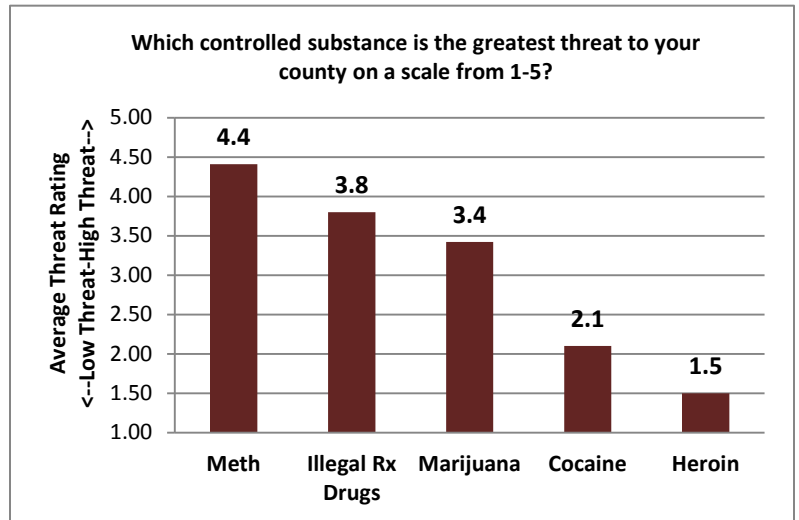


Respondents were asked to select which legislative proposals they believed should be discussed by the State of Nebraska. Four proposals were given and respondents could select as many of the proposals as they wanted.

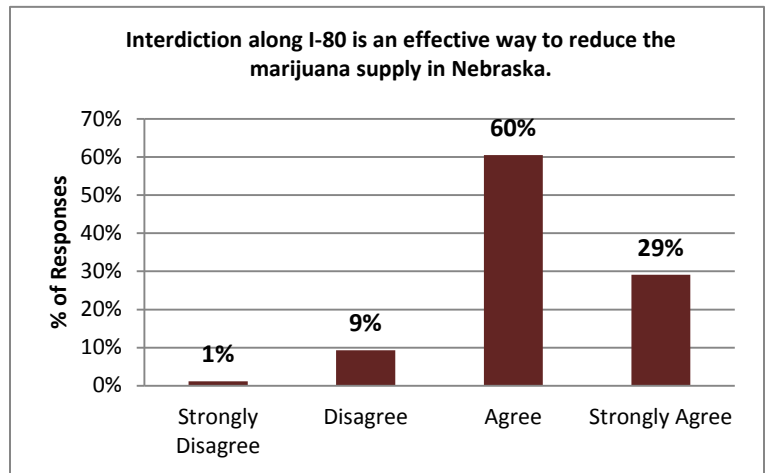
The proposal selected most often by respondents was “increase penalty for intent to deliver” (58 percent). The other three proposals were also selected, but at a much smaller percentage of respondents.



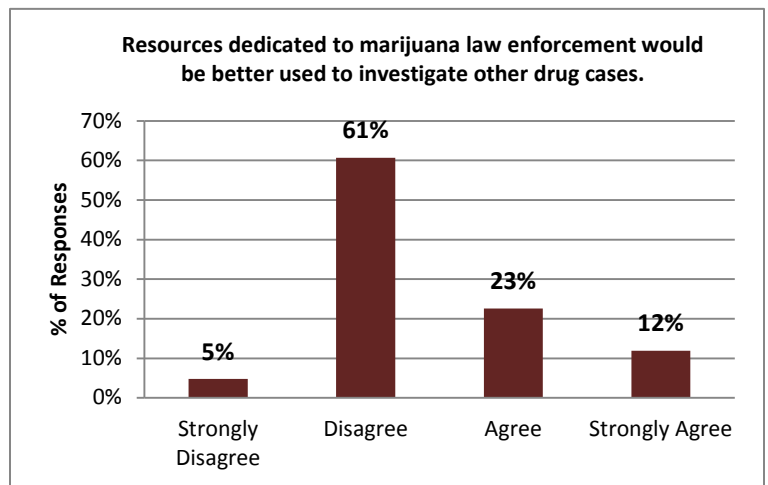
Survey respondents were asked to rank five controlled substances by threat to their county, with 5 being the greatest threat and 1 being the lowest threat. Marijuana came in third, with an average threat ranking of 3.4. Meth was seen as the highest threat, followed by illegal prescription drugs, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin.



When asked if interdiction is an effective way to reduce the marijuana supply in Nebraska, 89 percent of respondents were in agreement that it is an effective enforcement practice.



In general, survey respondents disagreed that resources dedicated to marijuana law enforcement would be better used to investigate other drug cases. However, it should be noted just over a third of survey respondents (35 percent) agreed resources could be better used to investigate other drug cases.



The end of the survey contained an opportunity for survey respondents to voice any other comments they had regarding issues related to the focus of this survey. There were 23 comments.

Issues brought up in the open comment section included:

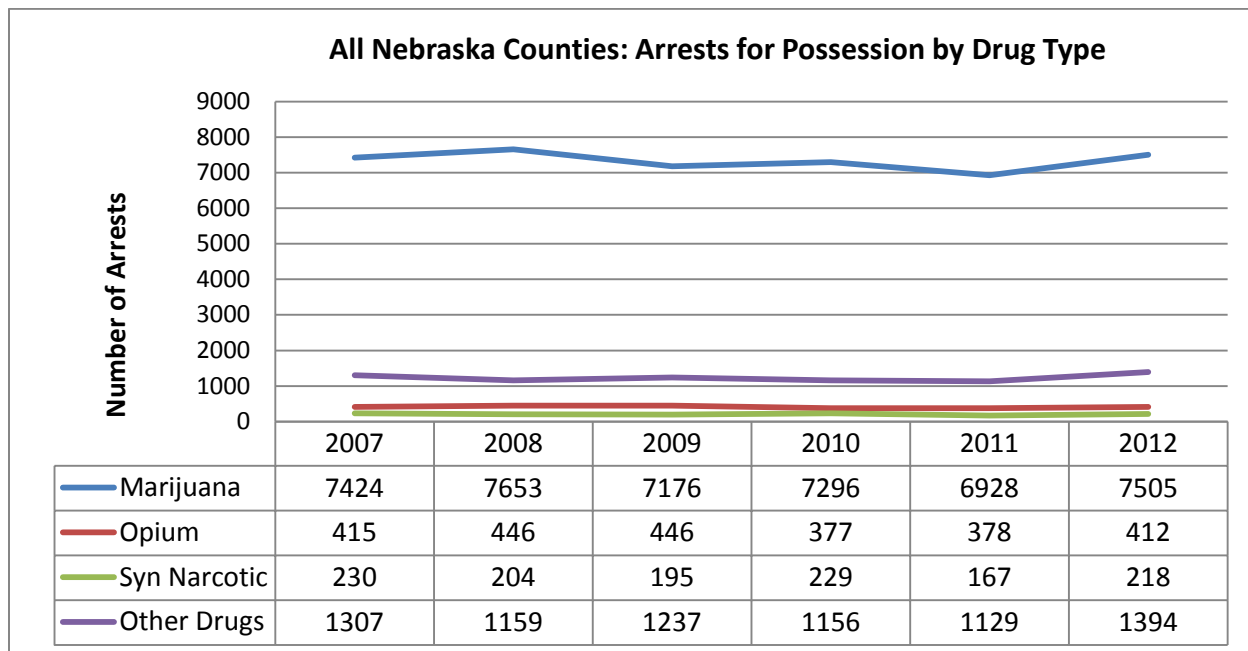
- More resources and improved technology for testing marijuana and testing persons under the influence of marijuana.
- Creating a better way to prosecute “intent to deliver” cases.
- Finding a way to reduce the costs of investigating, prosecuting, and housing those convicted of marijuana crimes.
- Creation of a drug task force.

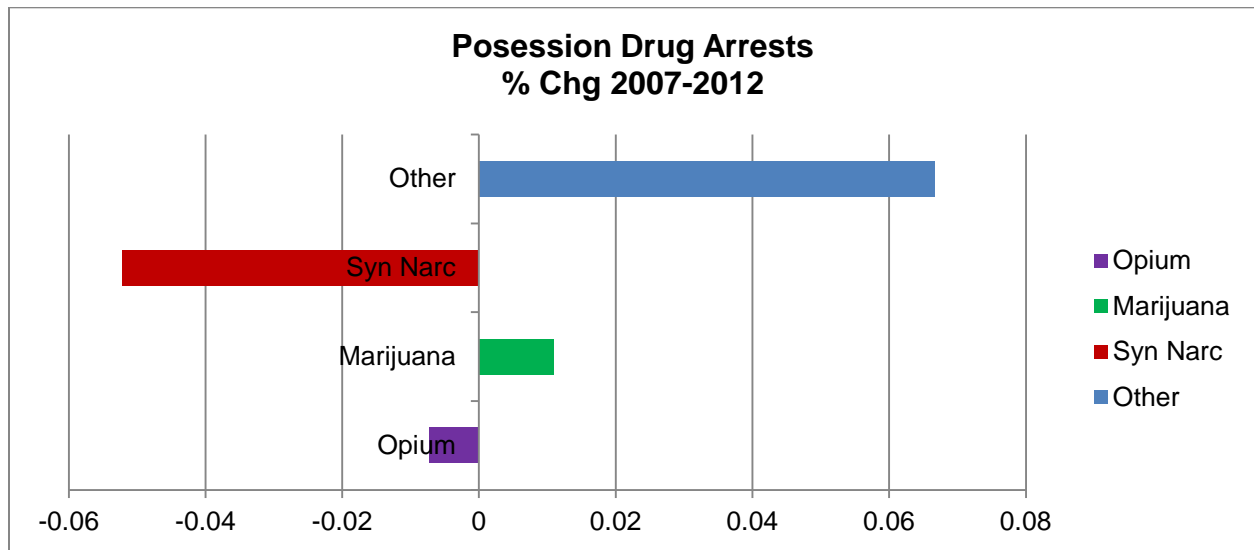
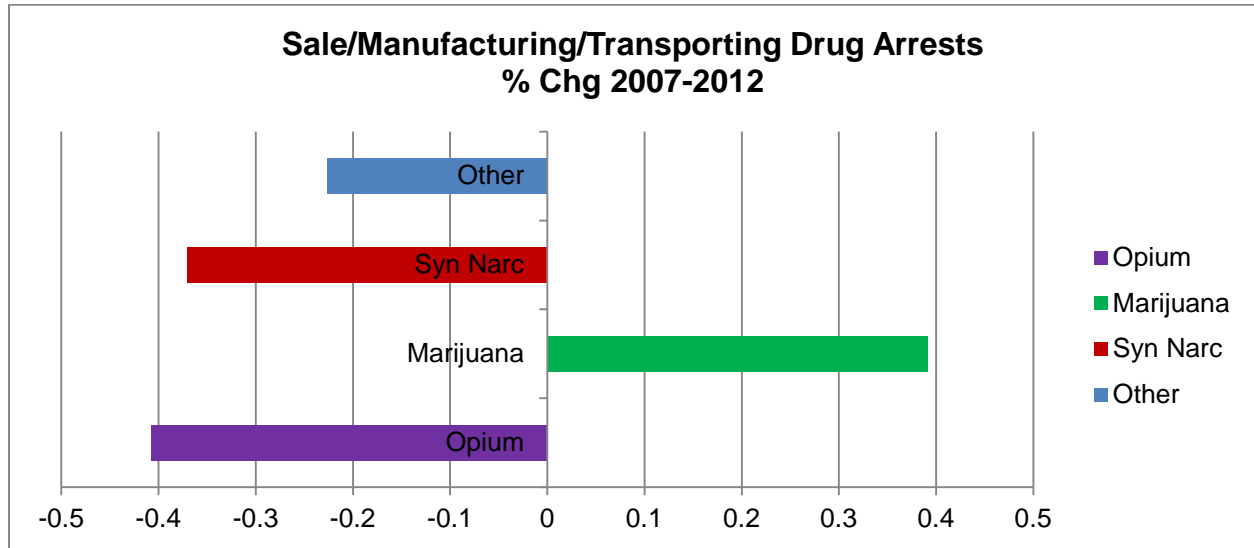
This study was designed to collect data on the opinions of law enforcement officers and county attorneys at the local county level. Analysis of the survey data revealed interesting insights about enforcement of drug laws in Nebraska counties and the impact that legalization of medical marijuana in Colorado has had on Nebraska counties. While the main purpose of this study was to gather opinion data to inform an NET News documentary, the data analysis may also be useful to the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association and the Nebraska County Attorneys Association.

APPENDIX A
Analysis Of 2007-2012 Nebraska Drug Crime Statistics

(Data from Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics provided by Nebraska Crime Commission. Graphics created by Michelle Kosmicki, MA, NET Research Manager.)

All Nebraska Counties Drug Category by Arrest Type						
Drug Category by Arrest Type	% Change 2007-2008	% Change 2008-2009	% Change 2009-2010	% Change 2010-2011	% Change 2011-2012	% Change 2007-2012
Possession						
Marijuana	3.1%	-6.2%	1.7%	-5.0%	8.3%	1.1%
Opium	7.5%	0.0%	-15.5%	0.3%	9.0%	-0.7%
Syn Narc	-11.3%	-4.4%	17.4%	-27.1%	30.5%	-5.2%
Other	-11.3%	6.7%	-6.5%	-2.3%	23.5%	6.7%
Sale/Manufacturing/Transporting						
Marijuana	19.7%	10.5%	9.3%	-8.3%	5.0%	39.1%
Opium	-9.5%	1.1%	-27.7%	17.3%	-23.7%	-40.8%
Syn Narc	-35.2%	-13.3%	28.6%	-25.6%	17.2%	-37.0%
Other	-1.4%	-26.2%	29.5%	-6.7%	-11.9%	-22.6%





NOTE: "Other" includes methamphetamine