

## **Current Status and update of the Gill Tract farm:**

Occupy the Farm went from being an occupation, to becoming an actual farm. The organizers who had been arrested by the police were now given keys to the front gate. Slightly than one acre of land at the Gill Tract became the UC Gill Tract Community Farm. Volunteers from the community worked alongside researchers from College of Natural Resources to create a research farm that operates a weekly farm stand, distributes food to East Bay organizations, and studies how best to create resilient, urban agriculture.

During the pandemic, the need for resilient, urban farming became painfully obvious. Tens of thousands of families in the Bay Area became food insecure. Food banks were stretched to their limit as a result of Covid-19. This one acre farm was able to supply food to 70 East Bay families a week, at no charge, even with delays and the complications of developing Covid protocols. Right now, with the arrival of Spring, the farm is busy planting crops, preparing for a productive 2021. Revolving crews of volunteers arrive each day to work the farm and are led by Farm Educators.

But, the Gill Tract land faces a new dilemma. Land that currently contains the farm's barns and offices, and that once housed numerous green houses, has been targeted by UC Berkeley for a large, six or seven story dorm. The dormitory is intended for an expansion of UC graduate students, and would be built by a Texas company American Campus Communities. According to its web site, this company specializes in "the privatization process". The company would build a dorm on the Gill Tract and then own and operate the building. This new dorm will shrink the growing lands because the existing facilities have to be moved onto the remaining fields. The new buildings will shade the growing fields, and comes very close to the open creek habitat area. According to preliminary plans, the dorm itself will provide no classrooms, nor any space or facilities for the farm, nor offer any educational linkage to this farm.

Capital Strategies for UC Berkeley has filed an "amended Environmental Impact Report", that is required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). But, the filing is based on a report written in 2004, and simply adds information about the proposed dormitory. However, the filing, does not update key findings. The University posted it electronically, and only allowed for a two-week comment period that ends April 2, 2021. However, since 2004 California has experienced the worst five-year drought in its recorded history, the worst wildfires in its history, the onset of climate change, and a pandemic. Climate change and development patterns have sent some species, such as the Monarch Butterfly to the edge of extinction. One notable absence from the amended EIR is any mention of the Monarch Butterfly whose West Coast population has plummeted over 90%. The Monarch uses the Gill Tract as a habitat and along with the Albany hills comprises the primary Monarch habitat in the Bay Area.

Further complication for the future of the farm, is that the University's ten-year commitment to operate the UC Gill Tract Community Farm will soon expire. The test of whether these public resources are for research for the public good, or will be "privatized" is once again on the table.

According to UC Capital Strategies, the UC Regents still have to approve the plans and the contract with American Campus Communities.