

Urgent: Gill Tract Update
May 14, 2012 , 6:16 AM

Early this morning officers from the UCPD, along with personnel from other UC police departments, began taking the steps necessary for UC Berkeley to regain full control and supervision of our property in and around the Gill Tract. After weeks of patient dialogue, engagement and rejected offers of compromise, we deeply regret that the occupiers' actions and continued insistence on free and unfettered access to what is an open air laboratory left us no choice but to take this step. As the occupiers said in their statement rejecting our invitation to participate in efforts to sustain urban agriculture, "We're not ceding control or supervision."

It is no cause for celebration that the involvement of law enforcement is required to secure our fundamental property rights and protect a core value that is an indivisible part of who we are: academic freedom; the ability of our faculty and students to pursue their scientific interests without interference. We have said from the beginning that we would honor our commitment to protect the university's rights and values.

The UCPD has been asked to secure the property and, if need be, arrest and detain those who continue to trespass and/or violate other laws of the state. The purpose of today's action is to ensure our faculty and students can conduct the research projects to which they have devoted much of their academic and professional lives. Over the course of the last three weeks we have consistently stated that the field must be prepared for research crops by the middle of May, and we simply cannot wait any longer lest our faculty and students lose a full year of work. As the dean of our College of Natural Resources, Keith Gillless, has made clear, you simply can't engage in meticulous plant research with dozens of uninvited, untrained and unsupervised "guests" roaming around what is an open-air laboratory, doing what ever they please.

We did not come to this decision lightly. Despite growing concern and demands for action emanating from our faculty and neighbors, we have patiently tried to engage the occupiers in discourse that could have led to a very different outcome. Dean Gillless has been down to the tract on numerous occasions to speak with the occupiers, we met with their representatives and attorney, and continued to present ideas that would have allowed for a peaceful resolution. We also offered a proposal that would have addressed the shared interests of the campus, the surrounding community and at least those members of the occupation group who

claimed that their actions were solely about the establishment of urban agriculture on the tract. Early on we made it very clear that there was room for both research and urban agriculture, and asked only that the occupiers vacate our land and return full control and supervision of the property to the campus. We also promised to cease efforts to pursue criminal charges and/or civil litigation if they would only leave and refrain from unauthorized entry onto our land. This gradual approach reflected a genuine effort on our behalf to reach a peaceful conclusion that would allow our research to re-start while establishing a dialogue with all interested parties concerning how the unused portion of the land could be repurposed. At every step of the way our efforts were either rejected or ignored, and sadly we have now run out of time.

On Saturday morning Dean Gillless organized a meeting to begin discussions about models for a community partnership that would support and sustain urban agriculture on the Gill Tract. Representatives of the occupation were invited to attend if they would simply meet our minimal conditions that would have allowed research to commence this week. They refused, offering a variety of excuses, including the claim that they wouldn't participate in a "super secret" meeting attended by members of the Albany and University Village communities, along with representatives of non-profits involved in urban agriculture, the City of Albany, the Albany schools, the USDA, the UC Cooperative Extension, as well as faculty members and a journalist. We remain mystified and disappointed that the occupiers just could not take "yes" for an answer.

Saturday's meeting was but a preliminary step. As Dean Gillless stated in an open letter issued after the meeting, "I am committed to facilitating an effective partnership between my College and the community around how urban agriculture and research can go beyond mere co-existence." Going forward, we are committed to the broadest possible participation in the discussions about, and implementation of that partnership. In so far as the short- and long-term future of the land is concerned, we will continue the collaboration that has characterized our relationship with the Albany community in all matters related to future use of this property.

Unfortunately, there have been some acts of vandalism to fences and signs at the Gill Tract, and we will need to ascertain if there has been any serious damage to ongoing projects, or cleanup that will further delay research operations. In the days ahead we will be assessing that damage and the required repairs, even as we work to preserve the crops planted by the occupiers where there is no conflict with our research needs.

This statement, like every previous message, is the result of a careful, broad-based decision-making process that includes senior administration leaders, the chair of our Academic Senate and other members of faculty, the deans of the College of Natural Resources and the Graduate Division, UCPD, Student Affairs and Community Relations.

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