

Silicon Valley still needs agricultural research center

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Two significant events are taking place concurrently that will harm Silicon Valley forever. If we act quickly these changes can be reversed. Because of our state budget deficit, in early February our 82-year-old, 17-acre University of California Agricultural Research Center in Santa Clara County will be sold. Our center was selected because our land values are higher than the other nine



Guest comment

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rural centers. The money from the sale will not return to our community but will pay for short-term political mistakes. We will lose federal and state money, six researchers, buildings with a center for public education, ongoing urban research, and a weather station. These benefits will not return.

The second event is unfolding more slowly. Even with an upswing in the economy, the valley will never be the same. Why? Little silicon valleys are surfacing worldwide. To compete globally, the valley needs to reinvent itself. These two events are related, but neither the agriculture/horticulture nor the technology communities understand how they can benefit each other.

Biotechnology, the revolution for the 21st century, needs a new definition. Biotech includes not only gene and cell manipulation to cure a small percentage of our population with diseases. It should also include the study of microorganisms that can clean up our environment and also create better soil for healthier food without chemicals and fertilizers. It should weave biology and technology together and help us understand how to live with nature harmoniously and with less expense than we currently are doing.

Ecology, the science of the inter-relationships of life, is vital to this work. Such research and education is more positive than the existing biotech research and can prevent disease thus keep the majority of our

citizens healthy.

The way the valley is being built demonstrates our lack of ecological awareness.

For example, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, which has the largest redevelopment budget in the state and one of the largest in the country, is building parks along the Guadalupe River downtown corridor that have almost no native plants, reflect the style

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of different famous designers, and have no continuity.

Their projects include expensive imported stone, no sustainability, and no sense of our local heritage.

The valley's new housing developments are birdless with almost no native plants, and plants which will be too large for their small planting beds. Also, San Jose's newly planted palm "theme tree" does not grow well in our cold climate and, therefore, continuously has dead fronds. Two of San Jose's largest parks, Guadalupe and Prusch, are dominated by airplane and freeway sounds.

At least three times private agriculture land was given to valley governments for agriculture/horticultural purposes and was sold by our governments for purposes other than for which it was donated without even placing the idea somewhere else. The Future Farmers land across from Lincoln High School was replaced with housing by the San Jose Unified School District; the existing San Jose City Hall was built on a botanical garden site; Prusch Farm Park's 87 acres

was reduced by half with the 101/280 freeway intersection and San Jose's Police Activity League Stadium. These stories are being repeated in all California urban centers.

Agriculture, not technology, is California's No. 1 business.

It remained so even during the high tech boom. It has reinvented itself as our culture has urbanized.

Environmental horticulture, urban ecology, urban horticulture, urban forestry, organic gardening, and ecological farming are the directions for current and future agriculture research. Each of the State's agriculture centers focuses on its unique ecology and community.

Without our Center, our needs will not be met by the rural centers and other two coastal centers in Mendocino and Ventura counties.

Silicon Valley's continuing economic and technological leadership depends on our ability to weave biology and technology together. The Agricultural Research Center is an intimate part of our future and can result in new jobs and better health. Its \$30 million sale will be a small dent in our \$35 billion deficit.

The Santa Clara City Council is reviewing the zoning status of the center. They have the power to keep it zoned in agriculture or to change it to housing. The meeting for this decision will be Feb. 4 from 7 to 9 p.m. at City Hall. Help the council understand your concerns by coming to the meeting or writing them immediately: c/o City Hall, 1500 Warburton Ave., Santa Clara, CA 95050. Gov. Davis is the only person who can stop the land's sale. You should also write him: State Capitol Building, First Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814. Visit www.secretgardens.com for details or ideas of what to include in your letter.

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