

## Sunol organic farm won't shrink with corp yard expansion

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SUNOL -- Score one for the little guy.

A small, successful organic farm is holding on to its entire prized patch of land, thanks to protests from an allied front of local preservationists, environmentalists and farmers.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission this summer announced plans to expand a corporation yard by eating into 4½ acres of the SAGE Sunol Water Temple AgPark organic farm. But the PUC backed off after several organizations complained that growing produce is a better use for that land than parking and maintaining vehicles and equipment.

"It's a pretty good outcome," said Jeff Miller, founder and executive director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, a group whose main calling is to bring steelhead trout back to Alameda Creek in significant numbers. "The corp yard project got a resounding 'no' from the community. It looks like they heard the message loud and clear."

Tim Ramirez, a director of natural resources with SFPUC, said the corp yard expansion is part of a larger project that also includes the planned Alameda Creek Watershed Center, to be built near the Sunol Water Temple and the farm plots. Construction of the center, which would offer indoor and outdoor education about the surrounding natural areas, is planned to start in 2016.

At a July 22 community meeting in Sunol, the SFPUC announced it was considering the corp yard expansion to provide more vehicle and fuel storage area for the commission. That plan included taking 4½ acres of AgPark land - a quarter of the small farm's total 18 acres -- out of production.

Ramirez said the expansion idea was floated at that meeting after SFPUC planners realized they hadn't planned for enough corp yard room. Approximately 75 commission workers are based there now, he said, and that number is expected to increase by 15 in the next few years. "It was never a formal plan ... and we quickly learned that nobody was happy about it," Ramirez said.

Support for the farm came from representatives of Berkeley-based SAGE (Sustainable Agriculture Education), which has leased the garden from SFPUC and operated it for nine years, as well as from the Alameda Creek Alliance and the local preservation group Save Our Sunol.

"It could have been a continuing the trend of eliminating all food production in Alameda County," said Poppy Davis, program manager for SAGE. She noted that in 2014, 112 acres in the county were used for growing edible crops other than wine grapes, making the AgPark 16 percent of the county's non-wine cropland.

In mid-September, SFPUC -- which operates the Hetch Hetchy Regional Water System and owns 36,000 acres the Alameda Creek Watershed, including the land occupied by the Sunol Water Temple and the AgPark -- announced no AgPark farm land would be taken for corp yard use. Ramirez said, "We'll do everything we can to squeeze everything into the space we have; there is no Plan B."