

# Goat ranch OK'd

## Board votes compromise biomedical farm rule

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SANTA CRUZ — Biomedical ranches will be allowed on agricultural land in Santa Cruz County, but the operations will be strictly regulated, under an ordinance approved late Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors.

By allowing animals used for biotechnology to be raised on farmland, the county is essentially recognizing the practice as a new form of agriculture.

The move also means that Santa Cruz Biotechnology can continue housing its 1,500 antibody-producing goats on agricultural land just north of the Santa Cruz city limits.

"The ultimate result is one that will benefit the county," said Paul Bruno, the firm's attorney. "It is recognition of diverse agriculture and the promotion of diverse agriculture as important to the Santa Cruz County economy."

Whether raising goats for antibodies is a form of farming has been a point of dispute since this issue surfaced more than a year ago. It was again discussed Tuesday.

County Agricultural Commissioner Dave Moeller told supervisors that goat ranching is agriculture even though it does not produce food or fiber.

He cited how the county's floral industry also produces neither food nor fiber.

A group of about 20 North Coast farmers, however, signed a petition disagreeing that a biomedical goat ranch is a form of farming.

While the new ordinance ends that debate in terms of county planning rules, it wasn't a com-

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plete victory for biotechnology interests.

Company president John Stephenson had wanted some of the restrictions that limit the size of such operations to be relaxed.

At the same time, neighbors wanted the county's best soils to be protected from biotechnology. They wanted the ordinance made even tougher, saying the county should move cautiously in this new area or risk changing the face of agriculture.

"We would have liked the language on setting the number of goats and the total size of structures and location as we had suggested in our revised ordinance, but it could have been worse," said Lloyd Williams, attorney for the Back Ranch Road Association, whose members are neighbors to the ranch.

The ordinance states that the maximum land coverage by all structures and impervious surfaces that are a part of the biomedical livestock operation will not exceed 1 percent of the total gross size.

Another rule states that when

the Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission makes a recommendation on the number of animals on a site it should be based on how many animals could be feasibly and economically grazed on the land assuming at least 40 percent of feed will be from grazing.

Although there was much discussion over these two points, they remain in the ordinance.

County leaders split several times on how restrictive the rules should be for biotechnology operations before adopting the ordinance. For example, Supervisor Walt Symons sought an amendment to increase the maximum land coverage figure to 2 percent. Supervisor Jeff Almquist wanted to add a regulation that would have required an environmental impact report if an applicant proposed to manage more than 1,000 animals. Neither, however, had the necessary support to pass.

The ordinance as proposed by the Planning Commission seemed to be a compromise for both sides.

"This has been a long and difficult process," said Chairwoman Mardi Wormhoudt. "... I actually

think we came up with a good ordinance."

The ordinance goes to the California Coastal Commission for its approval.

Santa Cruz Biotechnology must also still prepare a master plan for the site as a condition of the new ordinance. The firm, which has its labs in Santa Cruz, produces the antibodies for use in cancer and AIDS research.

Until the master plan is approved, the ranch is allowed to only expand by 10 percent, under a condition approved by supervisors Tuesday.

Williams had asked that a freeze be placed on the number of goats and the construction of buildings on the ranch except for the Stephenson home, which is being built on the property.

Supervisor Ray Belgard, however, pushed for the company to be allowed to grow by 10 percent. The motion was originally denied with Supervisors Wormhoudt, Almquist and Jan Beautz voting against it.

Almquist, however, reconsidered and joined Belgard and Symons in supporting the motion.