

Goat ranch ordered to shut down by Coastal Commission

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Goat Ranch
SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc. goat ranch north of Santa Cruz must halt its operations and be off the land by July 21, according to the Deputy Director of the State Coastal Commission. The president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, Michael Theriot, says the action will have a "chilling effect on agriculture throughout the state."

A letter has been sent to the company by the commission's deputy director, Tami Grove, bluntly telling the firm to get the 1,600 goats off the property and remove the manure from the site. On top of that the firm must do a "site restoration." The company has until July 21 to comply. After that they could be fined \$6,000 a day. The letter made it clear the staff is angry over present conditions.

"Run-off contaminated with goat feces

and urine has led to grossly elevated fecal coliform levels," Grove said in her letter.

Santa Cruz Biotech owner John Stephenson said he just returned from a trip to Texas and looked over land in the Forth Worth area for a site on which he can graze his goats. He's also looking at a Nevada site as well.

He said the company has rabbits on land in Nevada. He said rabbits could not kept locally because Santa Cruz County has strict standards. "No livestock operation can meet county standards," he said.

Theriot said the local farm bureau will take the issue to the state organization for their consideration. He said lawyers with the state farm bureau will research the issue and make a determination whether or not to take the commission to court.

The goat ranch ran into problems when they angered environmental groups by purchasing land that had been used to grow

Brussels sprouts and converted it into a goat-grazing operation. Neighbors said the operation was industrial since blood from the goats was used for cancer research.

Stephenson said the operation was "agricultural," and won the point in a local court. Theriot says the United State Department of Agriculture, State Farm Bureau and the state's Veterinarian Association also consider the biotech operation as "agricultural."

Stephenson said he was taken "by surprise" by Grove's letter. He said high counts of fecal coliform are found in other tributaries along the north coast, according to readings taken by his firm. He said he was not aware of readings taken by the county in riparian corridors near a goat ranch in the San Lorenzo Valley that produced counts similar to those taken at the Biotech goat farm.

"Is cancer (research) more or less impor-

tant than food?" Theriot asked. "I don't think my apples are worth as much as their antibodies (used in cancer research), but it's still agriculture."

Theriot said he has a problem with the Coastal Commission's activities in the agricultural arena. "These are not \$1 million houses overlooking the beach," he said. "These are food and fiber operations."

Neighbors have been fighting the operation for three years. They managed to win a ruling from the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors prohibiting the firm from constructing facilities the Regional Water Quality Control Board said would keep pollution from the site to a minimum.

After high readings were taken from the site during heavy February rains, the board backed away from their initial ruling, and agreed to let the firm make some alterations to buildings and to construct barn roof extensions and to construct some culverts to

keep water from flowing into riparian corridors.

Neighbors went to the Coastal Commission following the supervisors' approval of emergency permits for the project and the commission's staff responded with a letter telling the county they had overstepped their bounds.

The neighbors won a temporary restraining order from the court blocking construction until a July 28 hearing. County Counsel Samuel Torres said the court issue is moot.

Charles Lester of the Coastal Commission staff said Grove acted on her own, which she is allowed to do under the law.

Supervisor Tony Campos said he has dealt with Grove in the past and commented, "she is hard nosed." He said he thought the issue would go through hearings before the board before they went to the commission.