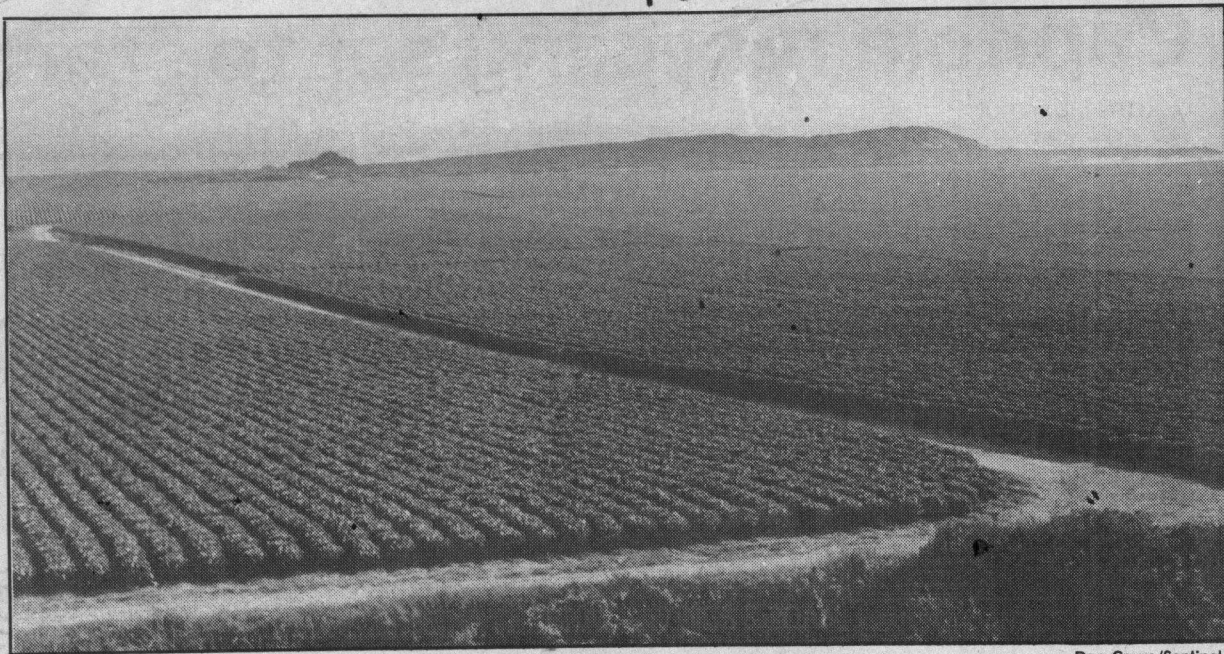


Farms



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The proposed abalone farm would be behind this hill, seen from Highway 1 on the north coast.

Abalone farm's fate in limbo

By MARIA GAURA
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SANTA CRUZ — The fate of a controversial abalone farm was left hanging Wednesday, when the county Planning Commission continued a long-awaited public hearing on the project.

The hearing will reconvene at 9 a.m. Feb. 22, in county supervisors chambers.

Wednesday's hearing went on for more than three hours, and more than 10 people still wanted to speak to the commission about the project when the time to adjourn, 5:30 p.m., rolled around. Those people were asked to return to speak Feb. 22. In addition, county planning staff members were told to find answers to a laundry list of questions about the project by that date.

The proposed abalone farm has drawn a lot of heat from people who don't want it built on a coastal terrace 5.5 miles north of Santa Cruz near Highway 1. Much of the opposition has come from residents of the Old Coast Road neighborhood, a small residential subdivision located near the project site.

At Wednesday's hearing the large audience was almost evenly divided between boosters and oppo-

nents of the project. County staff has recommended that the project be approved.

Pacific Mariculture Inc. has proposed installing about two acres of shaded abalone growing tanks on the property, as well as a portable office and laboratory, a maintenance shop, pumphouse and three large seawater storage tanks.

Much of the testimony centered on public access to the property, whether or not it constitutes trespassing and whether the project will change the access. Additional questions were raised about plans to drill into nearby sea caves to pump sea water for the shellfish, and whether the project would ruin residents' views.

Commissioners directed staff to find answers to questions raised about public access, possible "dark-adapted" creatures living in the sea caves, alternate caves that could be used, the economic success of other mariculture facilities in the state, the effects of a possible saltwater spill on the site's soil, possible alternate site for the project, the project's energy use, and whether future expansion of the project is planned, among other questions.