

Animals

# Bio-goat ranch ordered to heed the rules

By MAY WONG  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The owners of a North Coast ranch received a stern warning from the county supervisors Tuesday as planning officials moved ahead to draft new zoning rules that would govern its unconventional goat-raising operation.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously ordered the owners of Santa Cruz Biotechnology to stop any ranch-related development until they corrected their red-tag violations for trenching and erecting fences without permission and against county and coastal rules.

The board also banned the ranch owners from building any more

fences without consulting first with planning officials.

"I'm just asking that they follow the same law that everyone else follows," said Third District Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, who initiated the board's action.

Wormhoudt and neighbors were upset with all the expansion activities, including the construction of a barn, that have occurred at the ranch since the county supervisors voted three months ago to allow the ranch owners to expand "at their own risk" until new county rules were crafted.

"I know at times it seems easier for people to get forgiveness than permits," Wormhoudt said. "But I don't think the board was saying

(the ranch owners) could build and break the law."

The ranch near Back Ranch Road is home to more than 500 goats that are used to produce antibodies for cancer research. Neighbors and other North Coast farmers have vehemently opposed the expansion activities there, saying the land is zoned for prime agricultural use and should be reserved for more typical farming operations.

In a letter to the board, attorneys for the owners of the ranch and Santa Cruz Biotechnology, John and Brenda Stephenson, apologized for the code violations. The letter stated, however, that the violations "arose out of a misunder-

standing (and perhaps some naivete) on the part of the Stephensons ... to satisfy both various county agencies and their neighbors."

Fourth District Supervisor Ray Belgard sympathized a bit with the ranch owners and said, "not everyone knows our riparian rules."

True, said First District Supervisor Jan Beautz. "But we don't usually allow them to use it as an excuse."

In the meantime, the board told planning officials to start the lengthy review process in connection with drafting proposed zoning ordinances that would regulate biomedical agricultural uses like the goat-raising operation.