

Goat Ranch

Supervisors OK stringent controls on biotech firm

By DICK LITTLE

CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) took on the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, the county agricultural adviser, the county administrative officer and veterinarians from UC-Santa Cruz, UC-Davis, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and won a major victory in front of the Board of Supervisors Tuesday that may make it difficult to handle farm animals in the future.

For now, a goat farm north of Santa Cruz is the only operation affected by the law, which goes into effect Jan. 1. Santa Cruz Biotech raises goats for blood samples that are shipped to research facilities throughout the western hemisphere. They will be required to follow specific procedures when they castrate, dehorn, or put their animals to sleep, unlike other agricultural operations.

In the end, Supervisor Jeff Almquist supplied the third vote Tuesday to implement the ordinance drawn up by the SPCA mandating specific controls on the care of animals, although he did so reluctantly.

Those against the ordinance argued the specific requirements on dealing with animals contained in the ordinance would be more dam-

aging and bring on more pain for the animals rather than allowing vets flexibility with various procedures.

The SPCA said dehorning, dis-budding or castration should not occur without general anesthetic. The director of Animal Control Services (or designee) is empowered to stop what they see as "torture" or "cruelty to any animal." They are supposed to use the California penal code as their guide.

UC-Santa Cruz biologist Dave Casper told the supervisors "there's no designated way to castrate or (perform) dehorning." He said the USDA makes unannounced visitations, to make sure there are no cruel procedures used. Casper said the ordinance has "too many mandates... Santa Cruz Biotech engages in the same examinations we do."

Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt told Casper, "UC is a research facility... Santa Cruz Biotech is a for-profit corporation... There's a lot of difference."

Michael Smith, the regional inspector for the USDA, urged the board not to place specifics in their ordinance. He told the supervisors the federal government attempted to put specifics in their regulations years ago, and dropped them because "they just didn't work. Our methods request seeking better ways to do it."

The county agricultural commis-

sioner, Dave Moeller, supported Casper and Smith. "The federal government has set a proper level of care," he said. "Specifics could do more harm than good... Proper care differs from animal to animal."

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau President Mike Theriot told Wormhoudt, "We're not talking slaughterhouses here. We're talking about a biomedical operation which is agriculture... It's in the farmers' best interests to keep the herd healthy."

Santa Cruz Biotech attorney Paul Bruno said Santa Cruz Biotech in general supported the ordinance, but said he believed the specific regulations went too far. Supervisor Jan Beautz and Wormhoudt both said that when the Biotech ordinance was approved last year, the company agreed to the stipulations in the ordinance.

Almquist said it was "ridiculous we are doing all this for one herd of goats." However, he said he believed the ordinance would enhance the care of animals, and he said Santa Cruz Biotech did not produce any veterinarians to support their points.

Wormhoudt told the audience composed mostly of supporters of the SPCA, and members of the agricultural community, "the USDA is not likely to catch procedures that are not appropriate... This should not be on a case by case basis... We must set standards for the industry."

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