

# Biotech firm wins another round with supervisors

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~ SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz Biotech squeezed through another round of hearings with its neighbors, who seek to limit the firm's operations.

The company operates a goat ranch on the North Coast of Santa Cruz County and has been under constant attack by residents that live in an old subdivision near their site. Supervisors approved a number of staff recommendations designed to keep water that runs off the property from being polluted. The ranch has 1,600 goats.

At the end of a nearly five-hour hearing Tuesday, the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors approved a number of recommendations suggested by their staff they said would improve the quality of water running off from the property during the wet weather season.

"We are extremely concerned about the

continuation of an unpermitted use that has distinct negative impacts on coastal resources," Deputy Coastal Commission Director Tami Grove told the board by letter. "This unpermitted use continues to have documented negative impacts on coastal water supply."

Supervisors all but ignored the pleas from Grove at the end of the hearing and approved almost all of the recommendations from their staff, including allowing the roofs on two barns to be connected so goats could huddle between the structures during inclement weather. They also approved some manure berms on the site, but the firm will have to haul some of the manure away during the rainy season.

The board also approved a series of drainage improvements they said will keep water from spilling into some of the riparian corridors.

The company has been told its run-off

must meet a standard of 400 fecal parts per million, but readings of 4,000 parts per million will be acceptable following storms. "There is not a place in the county where run-off would meet 400 parts per million following a storm," John Ricker of the Environmental Health Department told board members.

Santa Cruz Biotech wanted some changes in the staff recommendations but he did not receive much support from the board either. Ranch manager Matt Mullen wanted to graze goats on the upper terrace where a water well is located, but supervisors said they had to keep goats away from the well area out of fear of contamination.

Owners John and Brenda Stephenson also have their personal well in the area and Mullen said there had been large herds of cattle on the upper portions of the property and they did not pollute the well water.

The board said the cattle had to remain 250 feet away from the wells.

Hydrologist Jerry Webber told the supervisors the property in question is full of cracks in the ground near the wells that would allow polluted water to flow in. He called the 250-foot set back suggested by the staff "a joke."

Attorney Bill Parkin told the board, "this is an illegal operation ... it does not have a permit ... it should be red-tagged and they should get rid of the goats." He also said the goats should remain away from the site until the firm has a master plan put together the county can approve.

He also said the supervisors needed to do an environmental impact report before they could take any action.

The facility has two tents on the site presently for goats to huddle under during bad weather. The staff recommended three more for the coming winter. The supervi-

sors agreed not to address the issue and leave the tents alone.

The board agreed to eliminate a food storage silo from the plan on a 5-0 vote, and to have Santa Cruz Biotech haul at least half of its manure away from the site.

Supervisor Jeff Almquist who was the swing vote on almost all of the issues failed to win a motion that requires the firm to lose five percent of their goats if they violate water quality standards two times in a row. "Five goats earns them about \$100,000," Almquist said "That's a good incentive for them to make sure they follow all the rules." Supervisor Walt Symons would not go along with the idea and sided with Wormhoudt and Beautz on the issue.

Supervisors also agreed with a proposal by Supervisor Tony Campos to ask Caltrans to fix a drainage ditch west of the property so water will not follow through residential property.