

Goat herd must go, state says

Goat Ranch

55m 7-12-00

■ **Biomedical operation:** Owners of coastal ranch west of Santa Cruz ordered to shut down by July 21.

BY LEE QUARNSTROM
Mercury News

The executive director of the California Coastal Commission has ordered the owners of a controversial goat ranch on the north coast of Santa Cruz County to shut down the operation by July 21.

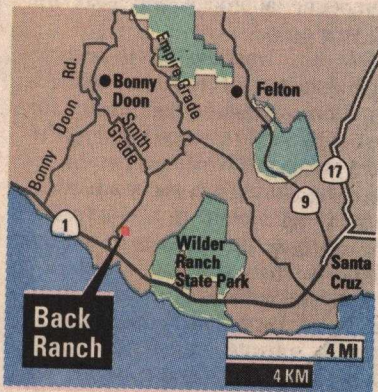
The surprise notice came in a letter to John and Brenda Stephenson, owners of Santa Cruz Biotechnology, which raises some 1,680 goats for biomedical purposes on its 206-acre property on Back Ranch Road four miles west of the Santa Cruz city limits.

The animals are injected with substances called peptides. Subsequently, serum is produced from the goats' blood, the Stephensons have said, and used in medical research and to make drugs to fight cancer and other diseases.

In a letter signed by Tami Grove, deputy director of the regional coastal commission, the Stephensons were told that their ranch constitutes an "unpermitted biomedical livestock operation and continuing unpermitted development activities in support of same."

Writing on behalf of Coastal Commission Executive Director Peter

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CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

“Santa Cruz Biotechnology has been given more than enough opportunities to stop the pollution on its own — and has not done so.”

— Jodi Frediani, neighbor

State orders goat ranch to shut down

■ GOATS

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Douglas, Grove ordered the Stephensons "to immediately stop all work on the property" that "requires a coastal development permit."

Neighbors living near and downstream from the Back Ranch Road goat operation have complained about pollution caused by runoff from the Stephensons' property. Those neighbors as well as county environmental health scientists have told the board of supervisors that fecal coliform counts in streams flowing from the ranch reached exceedingly high levels after last winter's rainstorms.

They have also complained that the Stephensons have built barns and other structures on the site without receiving proper permission from the county and the state coastal commission.

Neighbor Jodi Frediani said Tuesday that the coastal commission staff "has done the right thing."

"Santa Cruz Biotechnology has been given more than enough opportunities to stop the pollution on its own — and has not done so," Frediani said.

To comply with Douglas' order, Grove informed the couple that they "must take the following actions on or before July 21, 2000: Discontinue the biomedical livestock operation at this location. This includes removing . . . all goats; all manure; and all materials contaminated with feces and/or urine" such as hay and soil.

The couple were also directed to notify the commission's regional office in Santa Cruz by this Friday whether it intends to comply with Douglas' order.

Paul Bruno, attorney for the biotechnology company, said Tuesday that his clients are in compliance with Santa Cruz County's local coastal plan, which specifies what can and cannot occur within the coastal zone. He explained that the coastal plan allows 200 goats an acre.

Bruno said he couldn't understand why the commission was making such a big deal out of 1,600 goats when the county's own coastal plan would allow them to graze up to 20,000 goats for agricultural purposes.

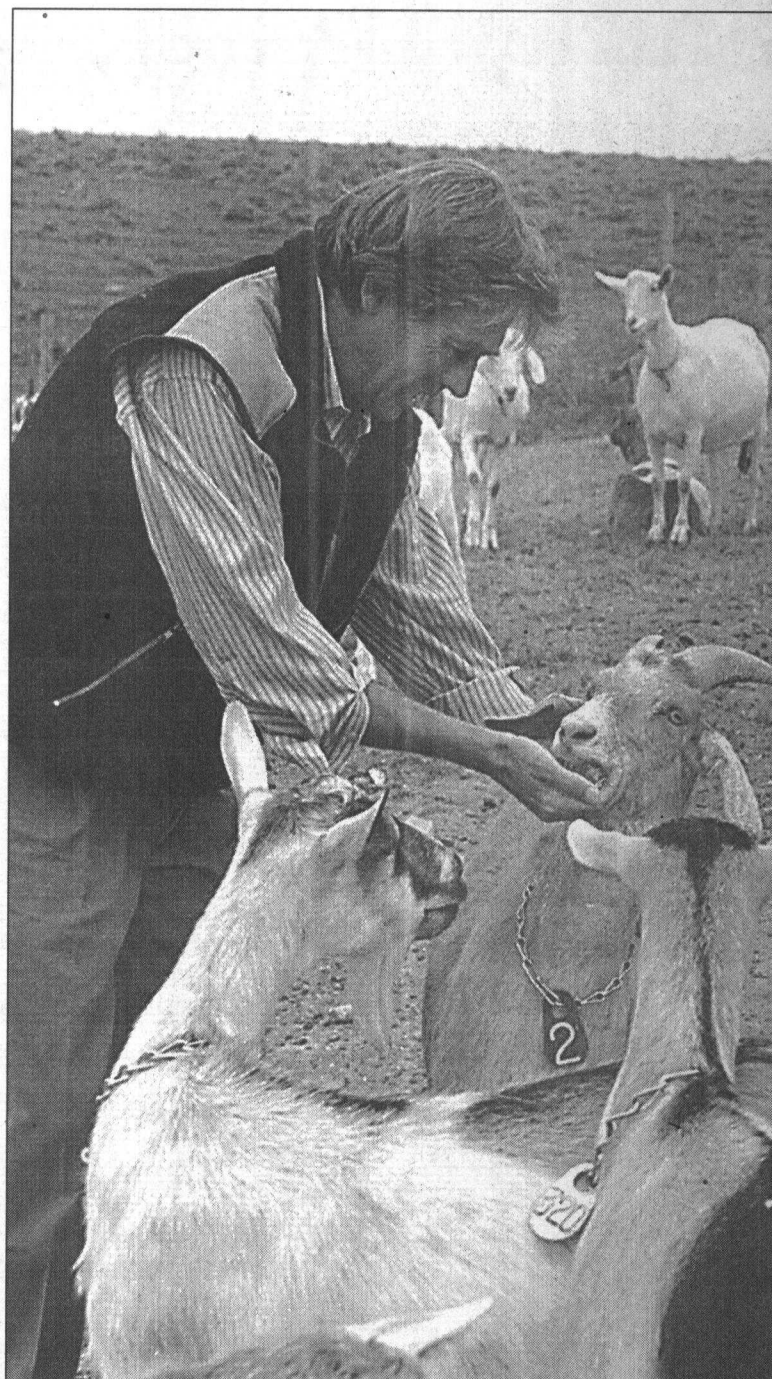
The attorney said he will hold an informal meeting with coastal commission officials on Friday. At that time, he said, Douglas' order "might be a talking point" during attempts to reach an agreement between his clients and the commission.

But Charles Lester, district manager for the commission, said Tuesday that the letter to the Stephensons indicates that Douglas will issue a cease-and-desist order mandating closing of the goat-ranching operation if Santa Cruz Biotechnology fails to comply. That, Lester explained, would be in effect for 90 days while coastal commissioners themselves looked at the issue.

Lester said the Stephensons could expect to be in "a judicial forum" if they failed to comply with a coastal commission cease-and-desist order.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, who represents the county's north coast, said the commission's letter "has finally elevated the issue of contamination to the serious level on which it needs to be treated."

Wormhoudt has sided with north coast residents who have frequently



JOHN WOOLFOLK — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

John Stephenson, shown with part of his herd in 1996, has been ordered by the California Coastal Commission to cease operations.

told the board of supervisors they fear for their health and that of their children because of the high bacteria counts in runoff from the Stephensons' property.

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