

LOCAL

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Biotech ranch submits master plan

Goat Ranch
County to review proposal calling for as many as 4,000 'working' goats on Stephenson land

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SANTA CRUZ — Someday, up to 4,000 goats will graze on the Stephenson Ranch, spending their days rotating through pastures named for famous racehorses and their nights in one of three large barn complexes.

They'll be working goats, growing antibodies for cancer research for Santa Cruz Biotechnology Inc. in Santa Cruz. Their blood will be harvested and taken to the company's laboratory in Santa Cruz for purification.

Along with the goats, there will be two donkeys and five biomedical miniature donkeys at the ranch.

At any rate, that's what's laid out in a recently completed master plan, the first detailed look at how the county's precedent-setting biomedical ranch hopes to grow and operate.

Years of controversy preceded the master plan. The goats last year led to the first ordinance in the state regulating biomedical operations on coastal agricultural land — to the dismay of some of Stephenson's neighbors who said the goat ranch is too intense a use of the one-time cattle land.

Later, county supervisors grappled with the question of whether the operation should fall under existing regulations regarding humane treatment of "agricultural" animals or "biotechnology" animals before deciding on a hybrid of both.

Now, John and Brenda Stephenson, who own Santa Cruz Biotechnology and the Stephenson Ranch five miles north of Santa Cruz, must obtain approval of their master plan — the nuts and bolts of their operation right down to what they will feed their goats and how they will manage the manure.

The first step will be taken later this month by the county's Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission, which will review the plan Jan. 28 and make recom-

mendations. Later, the plan is expected to be reviewed for approval by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

According to the master plan, there will be a maximum of 3,985 goats, about 1,000 fewer goats than the Stephenson's earlier said they would like to have, but about 2,300 more goats than are on the ranch now.

"In our experience that's a reasonable number of animals for our property," said John Stephenson. "We brought the number down to be conservative."

An analysis of the pastures found that the 255 acres of grazing land could support up to 4,512 goats, according to the master plan. Other than the changed number of goats, the master plan is "pretty much what we originally planned," Stephenson said.

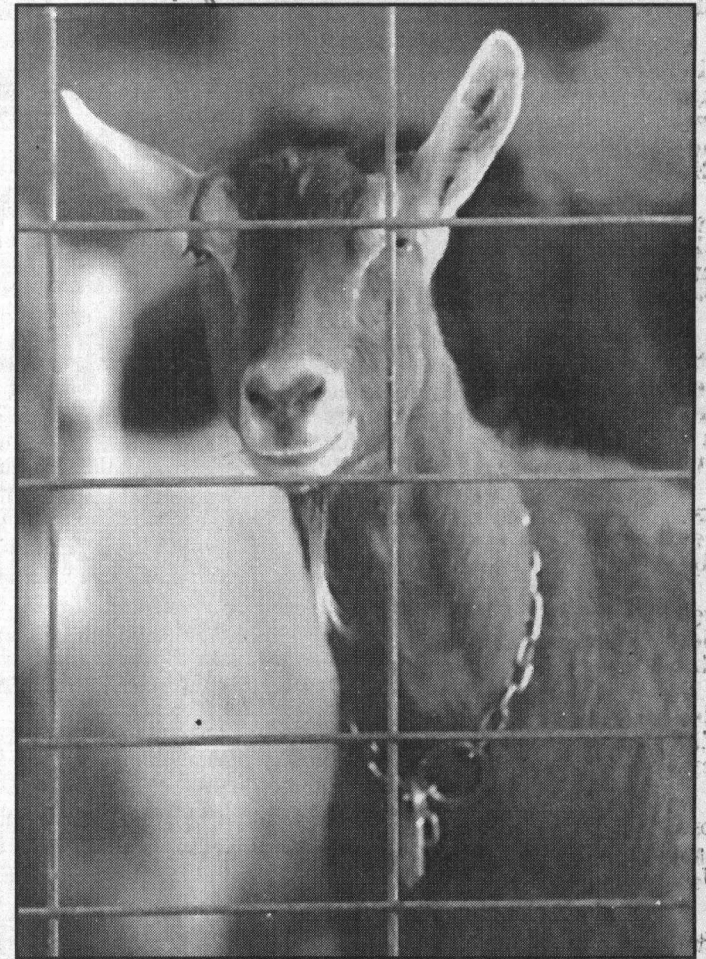
Development on the ranch is to be divided into four clusters — three barn clusters and the Stephenson's residence, currently under construction, in the middle.

An old farmworker house, a caretaker house and livestock shed are proposed to be demolished. Other existing barns are proposed to be modified by having a new roof built to bridge two barns.

New development proposed includes manure bunkers, grain silos and five new barns. The barn would be 125-foot long, 80-foot wide and 32-foot high.

A new 1,200 square foot caretaker's house is proposed, along with a 4,000 square foot building that will provide office space, an employee break room and veterinarian office.

Plans for Stephenson's home and a six- to eight-horse barn are not part of the master plan, and are on a separate track for county building approvals.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Goats at Stephenson Ranch will grow antibodies for cancer research. Their blood will be harvested and taken to Santa Cruz Biotechnology's lab for purification.