

Commission sets up goat ranch guidelines

Goat Ranch 3.12.98
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The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday told Santa Cruz County officials they can classify the raising of goats for biomedical purposes as agriculture — but only if they adopt certain “safeguards” proposed by the commission staff.

The commission’s vote in Monterey affects a controversial biomedical goat-raising operation near Davenport just north of Santa Cruz but does not automatically legitimize the operation.

John and Brenda Stephenson and their Santa Cruz Biotechnology firm have some 1,600 goats on property they own on Back Ranch Road, inland from Highway 1 on the coastal bluffs south of Davenport. The company injects the goats with peptides, then processes serum drawn from the blood of the animals into antibodies used, say the Stephensons, in medical research.

Neighbors say that raising animals for medical purposes does not meet definitions of agriculture un-
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Commission sets up goat-raising rules

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der county zoning laws. They’ve also complained that the Stephensons have established their Back Ranch Road operation without the necessary permits other landowners have needed from the Santa Cruz County government.

Safeguards proposed by the California Coastal Commission include assurance that farmland used for raising animals within the coastal zone be used for animal husbandry purposes only — not for laboratory research.

In other words, said Lee Otter, district chief planner for the coastal commission office in Santa Cruz, anyone like the Stephensons who raise animals for biomedical purposes “will have to make sure that their operation is actually agricultural in nature, that animals will actually be graz-

ing, not kept in industrial facilities.”

Also, said Otter, coastal commissioners added a proviso that biomedical animal-raising must be done on farms where no more than 1 percent of the acreage is covered by buildings. This is to assure that the rural nature of such farmland is maintained, he said.

Now, he said, the ball is back in the court of Santa Cruz County supervisors.

That board voted more than a year ago to allow the Stephensons to continue raising goats on their 200 acres on Back Ranch Road. But at the time, supervisors put the couple on notice that when and if the coastal commission approved the concept of biomedical animal-raising on farmland, the Stephensons would have to come back to the county for a permit for their goat ranch.