

Goat farm barn-raiser hits a new obstacle

Supervisors' vote a point for neighbors

Goat Farm
By **DAN WHITE**

Sentinel staff writer *2-2-200*

DAVENPORT — Area residents have argued themselves hoarse over an 8,000-square-foot equestrian barn proposed for a biomedical goat ranch.

And it's not about to end.

Instead of setting the barn aside as a separate project, as the ranch owners sought, the county Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 Tuesday to lump it in with an environmental impact report now under way for the ranch. Its completion is still months away, according to the county.

John and Brenda Stephenson, owners of Santa Cruz Biotechnology, first proposed the barn about three years ago. They said this fall they had already spent \$250,000 on consultants and barn plans.

They were unavailable to comment Tuesday but a spokesman for Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Matt Mullin, said he had hoped "common sense and reason would prevail."

"The (Stephensons) have been repeatedly playing by all the rules and following the course of action given by the board in 1997, going through an exhaustive study after study by the Planning Commission."

The county decision was a victory for neighbors, who argue the barn will touch off more development on a very visible part of the ranch, while also leading to more polluted run-off flooding their properties.

Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt agreed, saying that disturbing the land would make it easier for future expansion.

Neighbors also accuse the Stephensons of running a glorified feed lot that produces torrents of polluted runoff during heavy rains.

Neighbor and frequent goat ranch critic Jonathan Wittwer complained the barn would run up against the county's goals to preserve agricultural land.

"A new cluster could affect people's wells," he added.

Supervisor Jeff Almquist voted with the board majority but questioned whether the barn, in itself, would be growth-inducing.

"Growth is already in the master plan," he said.

Supervisor Walt Symons voted no, and questioned whether the Stephensons were being treated fairly. Considering the barn as part of the master plan, instead of judging it as a stand-alone project, will likely add to its cost and construction delays, Symons said.

The ranch raises goats that yield a milk laden with antibodies for cancer research.

Paul Bruno, lawyer for Santa Cruz Biotechnology, insisted the barn has gone through exhaustive reviews. He acknowledged there were changes to the original application, but said they were the result of community input and "the fear that this was a Trojan Horse barn that would be a goat barn ultimately."

The eight horses already have shelter, but it is primitive, with "lean-to type of roofing. It's not very modern."

Unlike the goats, which are used for research, the horses are being kept for pleasure-riding and possibly showing and breeding, according to the Stephensons.