

Coast Ranch

# Firm appeals limits on goats

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SANTA CRUZ — The head of a biotechnology firm is appealing a ruling that seeks to regulate a herd of goats that produce antibodies for cancer research.

John Stephenson, president of Santa Cruz Biotechnology and owner of a 200-acre farm on the North Coast, filed an appeal Tuesday in an attempt to overturn a decision by the Santa Cruz County Planning Commission.

"It's a safe, clean business," he said.

At issue is the commission's June 12 ruling asking the county Board of Supervisors to consider imposing regulations on animals used for medical products.

Santa Cruz Biotechnology, which has its laboratories on the Westside of Santa Cruz, is the leading worldwide supplier of antibodies for medical purposes. The goats live a few miles away on a sprawling, ocean-view farm owned by Stephenson and his wife, company vice president Brenda Stephenson. The animals, which are inoculated with inert proteins and then have blood drawn from them, are essential to his business.

At the four-hour commission hearing, Stephenson argued that raising goats is a permitted use on his recently acquired ranch no matter what product they produce. The land is zoned for commercial agricultural uses.

It's no more experimental than a dairy cow producing milk, he said.

Stephenson's appeal will no doubt continue a lively debate.

County Agricultural Commissioner David Moeller and Vince Bruno, a vocational agriculture teacher at Watsonville High School, both have said they consider the raising of the goats for antibodies a form of farming.

Neighbors and North Coast farmers, however, disagree. A petition by the farmers said they didn't think the production of antibodies was an agricultural use and opposed it happening on prime farmland.

Photographer Frans Lanting, who lives next to the Stephenson farm, said the case could open up the entire county for "a novel interpretation of agriculture."

"I don't think this is farming as we know it," said Planning Commissioner Denise Holbert at the hearing.