

## Local news

# Goat farm gets reprieve

### County rejects ranch restrictions as regulations are developed

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**SANTA CRUZ** — More goats will be allowed on an unconventional North Coast farm that uses the animals to produce antibodies for cancer research.

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors rejected a 20-percent growth limit on the ranch while new land-use regulations are developed to deal with such operations. The limit had been recommended by the county Planning Commission.

The goat ranch will be allowed to grow, at least while the county crafts its first regulations on the use of animals in biotechnology.

But there is no guarantee the final regulations would allow owners John and Brenda Stephenson, president and vice president of Santa Cruz Biotechnology, to continue operating, or to op-

erate without restrictions, supervisors said.

About 520 goats used to produce antibodies are on the 200-acre ranch owned by the Stephensons.

Their company, which has its offices and laboratories on the Westside, is a worldwide leader in producing antibodies for medical purposes.

The ranch, however, is key to the company's work.

Last week, supervisors determined that the operation is not typical farming and is not covered by county regulations. They upheld a decision by the Planning Commission that a review process is necessary for such operations.

On Tuesday, supervisors, however, rejected the proposal to limit its growth. In a 4-1 vote, the board said the ranch can continue without the limits.

Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, who

represents the North Coast, favored restricting the operation to its current size.

She cited concerns with allowing the company to expand when its use is not even allowed under existing laws.

Neighbors on Back Ranch Road had urged supervisors to maintain the status quo until a thorough hearing process is developed.

"The ends do not justify the means," said Lloyd Williams, attorney for the Back Ranch Road Association. "We all have to abide by the (county's) general plan."

Supervisor Jan Beautz said she couldn't support Wormhoudt's proposal to prevent the ranch from growing.

It's the first case that supervisors had to send to the Planning Commission for an interpretation on whether it is allowed under the county laws, she said.

It's different, Beautz said, than someone building a house and not following the laws.

Board Chairman Walt Symons agreed, saying biotechnology isn't covered in the general plan.

The Stephensons have maintained

that their ranch is no different from traditional farms. Raising the goats for antibodies is a form of agriculture like raising goats for milk, according to John Stephenson.

He has the support of county Agricultural Commissioner Dave Moeller and several other farm and agricultural officials.

Brenda Stephenson appealed to the board that any growth restriction would have "worldwide consequences" for 100 million people with cancer, AIDS and other diseases.

"Without antibodies, you cannot find cures for diseases," she said.

Paul Bruno, attorney for the Stephensons, called on the board to not send a message that Santa Cruz County doesn't want biotechnology firms.

He said the ranch would limit its work to raising the animals, inoculating the goats with inert proteins and drawing the necessary blood to obtain the antibodies.

"It was a very well-reasoned result to a hell of a dilemma," he said. "They (supervisors) found their way through uncharted waters."