

Reduction – Animal Use in Food Safety Assessment

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European food safety legislation started in 1962 with a Directive on food colours. Since these early days food safety regulations including data requirements involving animal testing, have mushroomed over the decades and, until recently, became a patchwork of some thirty-plus pieces of legislation and guidance documents. Together these regulations cover: food additives, feed additives, colours, sweeteners, enzymes, flavourings, food contact materials, food processing aids, GMO's, novel foods, food supplements and more. Only recently, the European Commission has started to harmonise food safety legislation for all food improving agents in a new single legislation.

EU has the most stringent food safety and food management policy in the world. Nonetheless, increasingly strict food safety criteria, quality controls and monitoring procedures have lead to an increasing number of food safety alerts. Current policies of openness and transparency, intended to build consumer confidence and trust, have in fact resulted in a decrease in consumer trust since at least weekly some sort of a warning appears anywhere in the newspapers. More testing has not resulted in more confidence, on the contrary, more testing reveals more 'uncertainties' and requires human and financial resources to address these which are not at hand. But there is hope: pushed by the urgency to assess the safety of large numbers of food additives, enzymes, flavourings and food contact materials, emphasis is increasingly more focussed on screening methods for priority setting. Such screening approaches, boosted by computational technologies and sophisticated in vitro approaches, have improved in power and became gradually more relevant and reliable. Added to 'older' concepts such as GRAS (generally recommended as safe) and QPS (qualified presumption of safety) and parallel initiatives such as QSARS and TTC (threshold of toxicological concern), an increasing number of food additives is currently being 'screened' only and subsequently considered as of low concern. Unfortunately, the culture of scientific food risk assessment committees and panels is still rather conservative and animal welfare is not high on the agenda. In EFSA efforts have been made to establish a general animal welfare climate among staff and external scientists but, at best, responses are lukewarm: unnecessary testing, although not based on requirements, is still frequently observed when evaluating technical dossiers but these observations remain without any follow-up such as an alert or reprimand to the notifier that such careless animal use is considered poor management.