

**Dear reader,**

Thomas Hartung only considered briefly whether to discontinue his series "Food for thought ..." in *ALTEX* after taking over a different portfolio at the EU Joint Research Centre in Ispra. But his 20 year history of working on alternative methods won him over. In this issue's "Food for thought..." article, Thomas Hartung focuses on the special situation of introducing alternative methods for the safety assessment of cosmetics. The article demonstrates how far we have already come in the last years as a consequence of the enormous efforts invested, and what is still missing. With regard to the reasons for some of the delays (see my commentary in issue 3/2007 on the cut of the ECVAM budget), he holds back his fire. On no other subject is there such widespread agreement in the EU population as on this; more than 80% of all EU citizens are categorically against animal experiments for this purpose (unfortunately, they do however buy products differently from how they vote). We must not let ourselves be lulled by the EU statistics that indicate only fairly few animal experiments (0.5%) performed on cosmetics. Most ingredients are not tested as cosmetics but as chemicals according to the guidelines of the relevant laws. Whether such a chemical is later sold to the consumer as façade paint, foodstuff or eye shadow can often not be assessed in detail already at the stage of testing. However, the EU is now heading towards a marketing ban of cosmetics of which any ingredients have been tested in animal experiments, even though not all required alternatives are available. This compulsion to innovate is unique. It is also taken seriously outside of Europe (see report from Korea).

The, in my opinion best, compilation of all arguments on the use of human embryonic stem cells has been assembled upon request by twelve authors coordinated by Marcel Leist, the Doerenkamp-Zbinden Professor at the University of Konstanz. The authors work in Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Sweden, Singapore and the US. They do not only consider the scientifically feasible and the hopes that are connected to the use of such cells, but also discuss the religious, historical and cultural arguments. *ALTEX* will continue this intensive discussion and looks forward to a round table discussion specifically on this subject at the Linz Congress.

What nanoparticles may get up to inside our bodies is now also of interest to the toxicologists. The possible modes of transport that such pipsqueaks can take in our body are mind boggling. Intensive work is going into establishing alternative methods to assess the toxic risks of nanoparticles pre-emptively. The goal is to install alternatives so quickly that it will not be necessary to replace any animal experiments. Barbara Rothen-Rutishauser and co-authors describe an *in vitro* model for the human airway mucosa that may be useful for testing the toxicological potential of nanoparticles. In the next article, Daniel Favre describes a method by which new anti-Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) agents against wildtype and mutant forms of the HBV polymerase, a critical viral protein, can be tested without the use of animals (ducks) or animal extracts (rabbit reticulocyte lysate). These animals are often forgotten; in some statistics they are not even included, as they must "only" donate their blood (for the harvesting of the lysate after a dramatic torturous procedure to make them anaemic first). *ALTEX* will continue to repeatedly call attention

to such uses of animals that are often not known to the public because the procedures appear less spectacular.

Andrew Knight, well known to the readers of *ALTEX* for his very critical articles on the medical relevance of animal experiments, has again and conclusively compiled many arguments on the limited relevance of animal experiments and has contrasted the scientific interest that should be present for alternative methods against the continued resistance toward their introduction. An article that should certainly offer animal protection circles good lines of reasoning. It is always interesting to discover which countries in Europe support alternative methods and with how much drive. We are thankful to ECOPA that we may present the results of their study to the readers of *ALTEX*. Even though the study could not reflect all furtherance actions comprehensively, it gives us good indications of the value attributed to research on alternative methods in the different countries.

Two items of good news first: The Doerenkamp-Zbinden Foundation has decided to support the Egon-Naef Foundation in establishing a university chair for alternative methods in Geneva with a very generous contribution of Swiss francs. Further, a transatlantic research project was approved, to which institutions in the US and Europe will contribute, which aims to realise the vision of the new era of toxicology described in the last *ALTEX* issue. The coordination of this project will be the responsibility of a Doerenkamp-Zbinden university chair at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore/USA.

We are dismayed by the report from Austria that animal activists have been imprisoned for months in this Central European constitutional state without concrete charges, except that they supposedly belong to a terrorist group. This must lead the committed animal protectionist to reconsider whether it is still advisable to spend one's holiday in Austria. In contrast, positive news from Spain: the ban on experiments with great apes is being carried by all parties and should soon enter into force. A similarly positive item from India: The "Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Alternatives to the use of animals in life science" appears to be taking shape slowly; Shiranee Pereira and Member of Congress Maneka Gandhi will already report on this in Linz.

For all readers, who are used to perusing the abstracts of the Linz Congress in issue 3: The abstracts have become so numerous and voluminous that *ALTEX* can publish a special supplementary issue with 100 pages for the Linz Congress. We thank the Foundation Animalfree Research in Zurich for making this possible by a further, generous donation. Many other news items and two conference reports (Hannover and London) complete this issue, which we hope you will enjoy reading. And note the back cover: next year the World Congress on Alternative Methods will again take place in Europe!

Yours sincerely,

Franz P. Gruber