

Press release:

Research for Life Science welcomes transparency in animal experiments – The number of animals used in experiments is declining

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Each year, the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) publishes its figures concerning the number of animals that are used in experiments; however, for the first time, it has also published the total number used for breeding and production in Swiss animal centres. "Research for Life Science" welcomes this transparency which underscores the well-known fact in research circles that the total number of animals kept is larger than simply the figure indicating those used in experiments. It is most pleasing to "Research for Life Science" that, despite the increasing importance and the progress of biomedical research in Switzerland, the number of animals in experiments is declining. This shows that the efforts exerted to reduce it to the absolute minimum necessary have been successful.

For research in modern molecular biology and medicine, specific genetically modified animals – especially rodents, that is, rats and mice – are the best suited and most commonly used animal models. Thanks to these animal models, the quality of studies performed has improved greatly. Because the results are more reliable, the number of animals that have to be used per study is, in general, greatly reduced. In the interest of achieving qualitatively superior research, it is important that the animals, to the greatest extent possible, show the same characteristics with respect to certain hereditary factors. This means that at least 2-4 times more animals will be bred than actually participate in experiments. For certain experiments, sometimes it is either only the female or male animals that are used. Because in natural breeding, both female AND male offspring are born, on average, only every second animal can participate in these studies.

As a result of this, only a portion of the animals bred can be used in certain experiments, while the others are kept alive in captivity, as is the case with pets and zoo animals that are in human care. In Switzerland, the requirements with respect to the humane treatment of animals are extremely high, as indeed they should be. In contrast to animals kept as pets, those found in animal labs at universities and in the industry, for example, are subject to stringent state control, including unannounced inspections. Violations are penalised. This ensures that the animals are exposed to no unnecessary suffering. It used to be the case that many laboratory animals were imported from foreign breeding centres. Today, most are bred – and kept - under the best possible conditions in Switzerland.

It is especially encouraging that the numbers of animals used in experiments is declining. Altogether, the total number is being reduced though at universities, a slight increase is seen. But here too, the vast majority of animals do not - or only slightly - suffer harm (severity 0-1). Considering the large growth in research groups in the Life Sciences area, and especially in Biomedical Research, the fact that fewer animals per study are required is a positive development that "Research for Life Science" deems a great success. In academic research, animal experiments are usually combined with alternative methods (cell-based studies and/or computer simulations) in order to achieve more meaningful results. This shows that researchers in Switzerland follow the principle of the 3Rs (reduce, refine, replace) to achieve solid and significant results using the fewest number of animals possible.

A joint press release from "Research for Life Science" and the "Basel Declaration Society"

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