Dear readers,

Having a good idea for an alternative to an animal experiment may be a seminal moment, but it is only one step in the long and weary process leading to its general use, which includes not only the establishment of the method but pushing it through publication, validation and implementation and may take many years of continual work and inner drive to complete successfully. Some alternative methods are certainly lost because their potential is not recognised, because funds run out or career changes leave open ends, because the people behind the methods lose interest or simply because the method is not implemented as it is not practicable, takes more time, is more expensive or simply does not become known to or accepted by the people who should be using it.

The Food for thought … article in this issue, written by Costanza Rovida, winner of the ALTEX prize 2010, deals with the varied reasons why in her opinion no new *in vitro* tests will be done for REACH. Although the intentions of the REACH Regulation clearly encompass the promotion of alternative methods, the mind-set of the registrants, the enormity of the demands on companies and technical difficulties make it appear unlikely that this enormous opportunity for alternative methods will turn out to be the hoped-for breakthrough for alternatives.

The two original articles in this issue do not boast the establishment of novel methods, but describe improvements of established methods that may make a significant difference to further their adoption into routine practice. Melanie Hamann *et al*. follow up on a method to prepare DNA for genotyping transgenic mice from stool samples instead of tail biopsies or other invasive sampling procedures and show that this is a practicable, sensitive and efficient refinement method. Vera Kerlata and colleagues describe that the addition of a non-ionic tenside to Caco-2 cells improves their vitality and proliferation capacity, thus potentially increasing the throughput of *in vitro* absorption studies.

We have chosen to include three further articles as Highlights of WC7 in this issue. William S. Stokes and Marilyn Wind share their views on challenges and opportunities for the validation of new technologies and new testing strategies, Carl Westmoreland *et al*. describe Unilever's diverse and long-term investment approach to improving risk safety assessment without new animal experiments, and Bennard van Ravenzwaay shows how evaluation of existing animal experiments can sometimes obviate the need for replacing them by demonstrating that they do not deliver essential information to improve the safety risk assessment and should thus simply be stricken from the standard requirement list.

We report that the new EU Directive for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes was accepted on 8th September 2010. This is a great blow to animal protection interests (see ALTEX 1/10, p.70) as shall be discussed in detail in a t4 report in the next issue. Better news is that the OECD Test Guideline on *in vitro* skin irritation using a recombinant human epidermis has finally been adopted and published. And we are glad to see that Indian and Eastern European universities are moving forward to reducing animal dissection in higher education, sensitising students to working with animals and potentially reducing animal use for this purpose by several million per year.

After a successful and inspiring conference in Linz, we recommend that you already save the date for the next World Congress on Alternatives & Animal Use in the Life Sciences, which will take place from 21st-25th August 2011 in Montréal, Canada.

Hoping you enjoy this issue of ALTEX

Sonja von Aulock
Scientific Editor, ALTEX