

Spotlight Feature

Biologics: A buy-and-sell trade

In this month's editorial (page 3), Stephen Driver of Matrix Biologicals Ltd points out that the best use of a laboratory animal is to use as many parts of the animal as possible. This will maximize the contribution of any given animal and minimize the need for other animals to supply biological material.

This brings us to the market for biologics, which includes animal tissue, organs and body fluids. Biologics are often bought and sold by middlemen—organisations that obtain the animal product and serve as brokers, both buying and selling biological material.

Two-way street

The purchase and sale of animal-based biologics, called bioreclamation, is a two-way street. For example, the head of a company that sources this material explained that a laboratory doing a study that includes testing rat milk might wish to purchase rat milk in order to develop an appropriate test before the study starts up. That way, the laboratory will know how to process the milk once it is taken from the study rats.

What will the animal laboratory do with the animals once their usefulness in testing is over? If the animals are killed, their tissue may be collected, perhaps by a third party, for other uses. Animal products brokers may go onsite to dissect out the tissue they want or might ship the carcasses to their facilities for processing.

Brokers may search out specific tissue for a client or may purchase tissue in anticipation of its future need. If, for

example, a client needs primate tissue, the broker would search out a primate laboratory and request tissue left over at the end of a study, as comparatively few primates are used in research. One broker we spoke with said, "It's our ambition to have a repository in our freezers or preserved, so people can inquire whether we have available any tissue types, serum types or fractions of blood."

Suppliers of Bio-products and related services include:

- B & K Universal
- Harlan
- Matrix Biologicals Ltd

Further companies are listed in the 2008 Lab Animal Europe Buyers' Guide. Request your copy by emailing us today: info@labanimaleurope.eu

Although some tissues may serve as sources of biochemicals or cells, others are used for teaching purposes, to aid students in dissection and in learning anatomy.

Brokers see themselves as aiding the 3Rs by making sure that an animal isn't killed specifically for its tissue, but rather that the tissue is collected from an animal that is being killed for other reasons.

Purchasers, according to the broker, tend to be clinical research organisations (CROs), pharmaceutical companies, academic biology departments and university

faculty. Sellers, on the other hand, tend to be animal breeders or government research organisations, such as the Medical Research Council in the UK. CROs and university departments, according to our source, not only use tissue, but also tend to donate it to the databank. Some of the largest breeders of laboratory animals, according to the broker with whom we spoke, "inevitably have animals that can't be sold." Sometimes, an independent brokerage may serve as their collecting division.

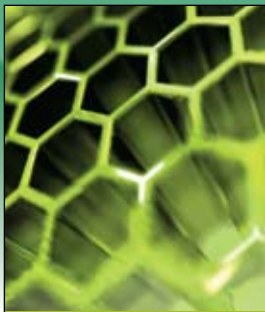
After as much tissue as possible is taken from a carcass, the rest may be sold to the pet food industry, our source tells us.

It's a dirty job....

The animal tissue supply organisations might buy numerous products. An online product list from one of these companies includes raw serum, plasma (in anticoagulants of the purchaser's choice), fresh blood products, tissues, organs, glands, animal-derived allergens, epithelial tissues, urine, milk and amniotic fluid. These materials may be matched by animal strain.

Not all brokers are everything to everybody. Our broker source explains that some may specialise. For example, a company may specialise in bovine serum albumin, which is used in many experiments and growth media.

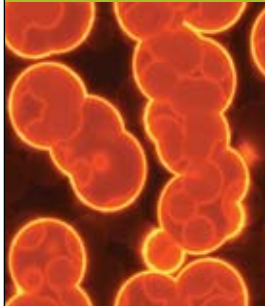
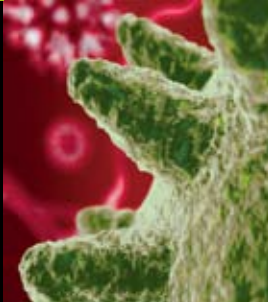
"If we can coordinate the best use, the optimal use of an animal, then we're reducing the number of animals that have to be used," notes our broker source.



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