LABORATORY ANIMAL .... SCIENCE - SERVICE - USE
Background for a FELASA Strategy

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This is a presentation to discuss a background for a FELASA strategy.

FELASA is a federation of laboratory animal science associations, i.e. all member associations are expected to be involved in Laboratory Animal Science (LAS). But we have a feeling that there is no consensus about what LAS is. What is it? What does LAS include?

1. WHAT DOES LABORATORY ANIMAL SCIENCE INCLUDE?

Somebody asked: "What is pharmacology?" and got the answer: "Pharmacology is what a pharmacologist does", and a pharmacologist is to us someone working in a pharmacological department or section. Likewise one could perhaps hope for a similar definition of laboratory animal science by proposing that LAS is what a laboratory animal scientist is doing. However, we will immediately find that this would not clarify the situation, because there is no definition of a laboratory animal scientist. There are many, who consider themselves involved in LAS but there are very few departments of LAS.

The reason why we have such difficulties in definitions may be that LAS is an auxiliary science that has no justification for its existence in itself. If biological or medical scientists should discontinue to need animals for their research there would be no more use for LAS.

One possible definition could perhaps be that LAS is what the members of FELASA are doing. If we accept that definition - and we think that this is what we in fact have to do - we will find that LAS will cover a very wide spectrum of activities. This is because, as we believe, the individual member associations of FELASA have somewhat different policies as far as their member recruitment is concerned even if they have a science orientated core in common.

If we list all the different types of people that in one way or another are involved in the field of laboratory animals we will get the following two groups: The first group will include breeders, lab.animal veterinarians, curators, animal technicians, suppliers of equipment, feed and beddings etc. and lab.animal administrators, all those that we may call the "Producers", because together they produce the scientific instrument, the laboratory animal, that is used in the laboratories by the second group, the biomedical research people and their staff or the "Users". The Users are primarily and mostly only interested in getting a reliable animal model. This second group is by far the largest in number.

2. PROFILES OF THE FELASA ASSOCIATIONS

We thus have a feeling that the individual FELASA associations show different member profiles and consequently put emphasis on different activity programs. Probably the majority seem to have a "Producer" approach, not because they contain all groups in that category but because they do not contain very many users. In fact several associations seem to be led by veterinarians. Maybe LAS is sometimes even considered a veterinary discipline? Perhaps the sentence in the final announcement to this FELASA symposium, that reads "We trust that FELASA '87 will contribute to the
international stimulation of laboratory animal science in the field of (veterinary) medicine and biology", justifies such an assumption.

3. SCAND-LAS POLICY

Scandinavian Federation of Laboratory Animal Science (Scand-LAS), that we represent, seems at least in its planning to differ in this respect. It was started and ever since headed by medical people, i.e. by users. Furthermore, in our member policy we accept and welcome all categories of both producers and users and our strategy is to eventually reach a member situation with many more users than today.

What reason do we have for such a strategy? Well, the people who started the whole business of laboratory animal science and formed our associations realized that the animals used in research very often were of unknown origin and of poor quality and that the researchers were unaware of that fact or even did not bother. So a double task was undertaken - one - to produce better animals and - two - to persuade the users that they needed better animals. Even if quite some progress can be registered this work is still going on. Although many users do realize the fundamental importance of using "analytical grade" animals there are still many who let the price determine the choice of animals. Thus there is still the era when the "producers" have the initiative. However, we must continue to get the users involved and not only have them accept the concept of quality but they must also become demanding. As this will occur the direction in which LAS will move will to a large extent be guided by the biomedical science itself.

That is why we consider it so important to engage the users in the work of our associations.

4. THE REASON FOR PRESENTING THIS PAPER

FELASA today comprises all categories of people involved in the work with laboratory animals, i.e. both "Producers" and "Users". That means that we have people engaged in lab.animal science proper, people that are engaged in giving service in several ways to animal production or to animal use and we have people that are only using animals.

We have brought this matter to your attention because if we are not aware of the different approaches of our different associations and in the different groups within them, we may run into confusions and misunderstandings in our cooperative efforts. FELASA is a fragile organisation and may easily fall apart if we do not realize the many diversified activities within its frame. All groups must feel at home in FELASA and have possibilities to a progress through international cooperation. We must continue the scientific work of importance for the development of animal models used in biomedical research, and that includes improvement of education at all levels. We must continue to give professional service to the biomedical laboratories and we must promote a proper use of animals under high ethical conscience. This could be effectively achieved if we also looked for cooperation with the biomedical scientific unions of different kinds and perhaps arranged symposia and congresses jointly, e.g. with unions of physiology, pharmacology, biochemistry, immunology, microbiology and even biophysics. A success along these lines will be possible only if we take part in the international social and political work and try to influence upon the policy in lab.animal questions. That is what we think should be included in the strategy of FELASA.

Consequently FELASA must act not only every third year at a symposium but also in between to promote the ideas of LAS. That means for instance that if a standing committee is formed by the European Council to follow up the new European Convention on laboratory animals we should see to it that we are permanently represented through FELASA. But, on the other hand, that necessitates a closer work between our associations to form a jointly accepted policy. And again we want to stress that this must be founded on the understanding that LAS is a service discipline to the biological and medical sciences. Consequently the program must include not