

Introduction

Intensive animal breeding for food production has led during the last decades to a substantial increase in the use of veterinary drugs for therapeutic or disease-preventive reasons and in parallel of growth promoting substances. This may lead to an increased incidence of residues or metabolites of administered compounds which still exert toxicological or biological activity. Moreover the quality of animal derived foods is threatened by the occurrence of mycotoxins and environmental contaminants.

The large number of compounds involved, sometimes simultaneously present in food products has attracted the scientific attention with respect to the development of rapid analytical and toxicological test methods in order to characterize risks for the consumer of contaminated foods. International trade of food products has grown notably during the last decades and therefore food contamination has obtained ubiquitous dimensions which can only be tackled at the international level. To this end an International Teleconference was set up on the computer network INTERNET entitled "Residues of Veterinary Drugs and Mycotoxins in Animal Products: New Methods for Risk Assessment and Quality Control". This initiative was undertaken by the Istituto L. Spallanzani of Milan, Italy and the EU FLAIR Concerted Action No. 8 "In-Vitro Toxicological Studies and Real-Time Analysis of Residues in Food", coordinated by the State Institute for Quality Control of Agricultural Products, RIKILT-DLO, Wageningen, The Netherlands and the Danish Meat Research Institute, DMRI, Roskilde, Denmark.

The idea behind this event was to communicate on a world wide scale via electronic mail on recent scientific progress in the area of risk assessment and quality control of food contaminants. Invited scientists from different countries have written review papers on actual problems in the area of food safety assessment. Subscribers to the Conference via the LISTSERV MEATQUAL had the opportunity to react on these papers by E-mail, while also submission of free communications was also possible. The Conference started at April 15, 1994 and ended at August 31, 1994.

This book contains the papers presented during the Conference as well as the discussion contributions related to the various themes. The objectives of the Teleconference were:

1. To review and develop new strategies for risk-assessment of residues of veterinary drugs and mycotoxins in animal foodproducts.
2. To examine the applicability of in-vitro toxicological methods for risk-estimation of foodcontaminants with the purpose of reduction of animal experimentation.
3. To design flexible and sensitive analytical methodologies to be applied for monitoring of residues on a real-time scale basis.
4. To establish criteria for good veterinary and management practices.

As a first experiment in developing new and rapid ways of communication between scientists working in the area of food safety assessment, this Conference can be considered as successful. In principle the information travels from desk to desk, at high speed and low

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costs. Approximately 60 persons from European countries and the US subscribed to the Conference, and a number of free communications as a reaction on main papers have been submitted.

We thank the participants and contributors to this Conference for their contributions.

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We hope that this initiative will be followed by other ones, with the intention of ever improving communication between people working in the field of food safety assessment, an area which is characterized by rapid fundamental changes in methodologies and approaches.

G. Enne

H.A. Kuiper

A. Valentini