

Animal testing, mainly of fish, increased in 2022

In 2022, WUR carried out over 104,000 tests on animals, 29 per cent more than in 2021. Most of these tests (80 per cent) were on fish. These figures are from the *Animal Testing Annual Report*, which was published at the start of August.

When numbers of animal tests and lab animals are recorded (different things because one animal can be used for multiple tests), a distinction is made between Wageningen University (WU) and Wageningen Research (WR). At WU, the number of lab animals fell last year to 10,693, a drop of 17 per cent. But at WR the number increased to 94,198, over 27 per cent more than in 2021. As in previous years, most of the animals used across WUR in experiments (80 per cent)

were fish, which must be included by law in the animal testing counts as of 2015. The annual report cites the example of glass eels, which are given minuscule markers in their thousands to track their spread. The remaining categories in the animal testing top five of 2022 are chickens (13 per cent), mice (3 per cent), pigs (1.2 per cent) and cows (0.6 per cent).

Most of the animal tests at WR (83 per cent) were aimed at the protection of animal species. At WU, tests were generally for applied research (62 per cent), and mainly to do with animal welfare.

Alternatives

WUR does a lot of tests on animals for the purpose of animal protection and health. According to Animal Sciences Group (ASG) director



Cows make up less than one per cent of all lab animals; fish are by far the biggest category • Photo Resource

Ernst van den Ende, these ‘target animal tests’ as they are termed could to some extent be replaced by other approaches, such as organoids or artificial intelligence. In the four-year programme Next Level Animal Sciences, ASG is investing a lot of effort and money (12 million euros) in the development

of technological innovations that could serve as an alternative to animal testing. ‘But technology will never be able to replace all animal tests,’ he stresses. ‘New vaccines or livestock rations, for example, will still eventually have to be tested on an animal.’ ME