

THE HISTORY OF FELASA – BIRTH AND GROWTH 1978-2010

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The Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA) has a membership of 18 independent European national and regional laboratory animal science associations. It can speak for laboratory animal scientists and technologists in at least 23 countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. A Board consisting of Officers and representatives of its constituent associations manages this Federation. Established in 1978, it has significantly grown over the years and is now recognised both at European and international levels.

After 27 years of existence, it seems worthwhile to remember why and how such a structure was implemented and what were the initial objectives and mission statements of FELASA.

In the mid-seventies, there was a trend in Europe to develop much closer communication links between the different European laboratory animal science associations. Although nothing concrete was done at that time, individuals like Karl-Johan Öbrink, Lars Wass (from Scand-LAS), John Bleby, Philip O'Donoghue, Peter Eaton, Malcolm Gamble, Roy Ward (from LASA), Klaus Bonath, H Bruhin, Anthony Ellery (from GV-SOLAS) and many others were discussing what should be the best way to initiate such a cooperation, particularly the organization of joint scientific meetings.

Accordingly, the “Preliminary” meeting was the first joint GV-SOLAS/ LASA/ Scand-LAS meeting on “The Laboratory Rat and Biological Variation” held on 26-28 June 1978 at Churchill College, Cambridge, UK. Representatives of the three associations met and it was suggested that a joint scientific meeting should be organized every three years by one of these associations in turn. It was decided that the FELASA Presidium should be run by the association arranging the next meeting. This suggestion was formally confirmed at a meeting in Utrecht on 21 August 1979. Therefore, as the German society proposed to host the symposium in 1981, the FELASA Presidium from 1978 to 1981 was filled by the GV-SOLAS President and Secretary. This was the foundation meeting of FELASA by these three European associations. The Federation was soon joined by the Dutch “NVP” and the French “SFEA”, and then progressively by other European associations.

The first FELASA Symposium was organized in Düsseldorf, Germany, by GV-SOLAS in 1981. At the first General Assembly the constitution of FELASA was adopted. This Symposium was followed by others every third year (with one exception between 2002 and 2004):

- 1984: Malmö, Sweden (Scand-LAS)
- 1987: Amsterdam, the Netherlands (NVP)
- 1990: Lyon, France (SFEA now known as AFSTAL)
- 1993: Brighton, UK (LASA)
- 1996: Basel, Switzerland (GV-SOLAS)

- 1999: Palma de Mallorca, Spain (SECAL)
- 2002: Aachen, Germany (GV-SOLAS)
- 2004: Nantes, France (AFSTAL)
- 2007: Cernobbio, Italy (AISAL)
- 2010: Helsinki, Finland (Scand-LAS)

The organization of these triennial symposia was the principal activity of FELASA from the outset until 1987. They proved to be of good service to European laboratory animal science. However, in between these symposia, very little happened and it was clear that some reorganisation had to be considered to address emerging issues.

Informal discussions about the role of FELASA were held among officers of constituent associations at the third FELASA Symposium in June 1987 in Amsterdam (NVP). It was generally agreed that the Federation should become more active and a meeting was therefore convened in October to see how this could be done.

This important joint meeting was organized by Karl-Johan Öbrink and Lars Wass (Scand-LAS) on 17-19 October 1987 at Odalgården, near Uppsala, Sweden. The aim of this conference was to reflect on the future of FELASA. All constituent associations were asked to send representatives, and a number of individuals were invited to take part in the discussion. It was a very constructive meeting and the following proposals were made:

- 1) To ensure the good functioning and the implementation of new activities for the Federation, it was essential to revise and modify the initial FELASA constitution. One of the reasons was that the President and the Secretary of the constituent association hosting the triennial conference were automatically President and Secretary of the Federation. It was clear that these officers were far too busy arranging the next symposium and did not have the capacity to address other issues. Accordingly, the new constitution should include new organisational structures, which should be revised and accepted by all the constituent associations. The Federation would have a Board of Management in which each constituent association would have two members. The Board would annually elect three officers who, together with the President, would be directly responsible for the administrative and organisational work. The most obvious change should be that FELASA would have its own officers elected by the Board from amongst its members, with duties and term of service that were not tied to the triennial symposia.
- 2) The Federation should establish a policy group in order to identify topics for further study.
- 3) It was seen as essential for FELASA to secure recognition in Europe - through both the Council of Europe and the European Union - as the authority to be consulted on all matters relating to laboratory animal science, with consequent strong links to Strasbourg and Brussels.
- 4) A specific task of considerable importance should be the production of appropriate education and training programmes for all those involved in the laboratory animal field. A FELASA Working Group on Education should be created to develop training programmes for the different categories of animal users: animal caretakers, animal technicians, scientists actually using laboratory animals and laboratory animal science specialists. The first step should concern the education and training of competent authorised persons and, particularly, scientists using

- laboratory animals. A common standard would facilitate the professional mobility of scientific workers within Europe.
- 5) FELASA should also establish a Working Group on Animal Health to encourage uniformity in assessing animals and contributing to standardisation and high standards of science and animal welfare.
 - 6) It should also establish and maintain appropriate links with international or other bodies concerned with laboratory animal science.

All resolutions from the meeting were sent to the respective associations for agreement and ratification. This was considered fundamental to the future development and increased recognition of FELASA. The revised constitution was also circulated before the FELASA Symposium in Lyon, France (1990) and ratified. An official Board of Management with an Executive Committee and its own officers was established.

This revised structure has significantly aided the Federation in its work. The national members or regional bodies arrange the triennial meetings. While this important work is under way and occupying much of the host organisation's resources and attention, FELASA Officers and Governing Board are free to concentrate on wider and longer term issues.

In pursuing its aim of achieving European recognition, we have had to recognise that there are differences in structure and working practice between the Council of Europe (CoE) in Strasbourg and the European Commission (part of the European Union, EU) in Brussels. In November 1991, FELASA was granted observer status for the sector of laboratory animals. The first success was with the CoE, which welcomed FELASA's recommendations for the education and training of all those authorised to raise, maintain and use laboratory animals. The CoE pressed the Federation to extend its advice and, when satisfied, adopted the recommendations as official CoE policy and formally thanked FELASA for its work. Once CoE policy, the FELASA proposals were considered in Brussels and adopted, more or less unchanged, as EU policy.

FELASA also seeks to play its part in wider issues by establishing fraternal relations with laboratory animal science associations outside Europe and by collaboration with international bodies (the 7th FELASA Symposium was a joint meeting with the International Council for Laboratory Animal Science-ICLAS) and other organisations with shared interests. On 17-18 December 1996 an European Congress on "The Ethics of Animal Experimentation" was organised in Brussels, Belgium, by the European Biomedical Research Association-EBRA- in conjunction with FELASA, with its proceedings edited by P. N. O'Donoghue and published by EBRA, London, UK, in 1998.

There are many other issues on which FELASA advises and you will find FELASA recommendations, publications and policy documents on the website (www.felasa.eu). Its strength in such matters is largely because it can speak for such a wide cross section of European laboratory animal scientists. When it has settled its policy by debate among its member associations, it can promote that policy with considerable authority. It is the European body most suitable to define, periodically review and to promote the best possible practise in all aspects of laboratory animal science.

FELASA International Symposia

- 1st Symposium: “First Scientific Meeting of the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA)”, Düsseldorf, Germany, 2-4 June 1981. Organised by GV-SOLAS.
Only Programme and Abstracts available.
- 2nd Symposium: “Second FELASA Symposium”, Malmö, Sweden, 16-21 June 1984.
Organised by Scand-LAS.
Only Programme and Abstracts available.
- 3rd Symposium: “New Developments in Biosciences: Their Implications for Laboratory Animal Science”, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1-5 June 1987.
Organised by NVP.
Proceedings edited by A.C. Beynen and H.A. Solleveid.
Published by Martinus Nijhoff, 1988.
- 4th Symposium: “Man and the Laboratory Animal: Perspectives for 1990”, Lyon, France, 10-15 June 1990. Organised by SFEA (now known as AFSTAL).
Published by Fondation Marcel Mérieux, Lyon, 1990.
- 5th Symposium: “Welfare and Science”, Brighton, UK, 8-11 June 1993
Organized by LASA.
Proceedings edited by J. Bunyan.
Published by The Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd, London, UK, 1994
- 6th Symposium: “Harmonization of Laboratory Animal Husbandry”, Basel, Switzerland, 19- 21 June 1996. Organized by SGV.
Proceedings edited by P.N. O’Donoghue.
Published by The Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd, London, UK, 1997
- 7th Symposium: “Animal Research and Welfare: A Partnership”, FELASA-ICLAS Joint Meeting, Palma de Mallorca, 26-28 May 1999. Organized by SECAL.
Proceedings edited by J.A. Tur-Mari and J.M. Orellana-Muriana
Published by Laboratory Animals Ltd, London, UK, 2000
- 8th Symposium: “Laboratory Animal Science – Basis and Strategy for Animal Experimentation”, Aachen, Germany, 17-20 June 2002.
Organized by GV-SOLAS.
Proceedings edited by J. -L. Guenet and C. Herweg
Published by Laboratory Animals Ltd, London, UK, 2003.
- 9th Symposium: “Internationalization and Harmonisation in Laboratory Animal Care and Use Issues”, Nantes, France, 14-17 June 2004. Organized by AFSTAL.
Proceedings published by The Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd, London, UK, 2005.
- 10th Symposium: “Tenth FELASA Symposium and the XIV ICLAS General Assembly & Conference”, Cernobbio, Italy, 11-14 June 2007. Organised by AISAL
Proceedings published by Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd, London,

UK, 2007

- 11th Symposium: “New Paradigms in Laboratory Animal Science”, Helsinki, Finland, 14-17 June 2010. Organised by Scand-LAS.