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LA Variety Pack

This issue of *Lab Animal* contains something for everyone, with article topics ranging from transportation, to advances in molecular biology, to husbandry, to simplifying the filing of regulatory paperwork.

The sharing of rodents between research institutions is now a common procedure, but the practice of shipping rodents, especially transgenic strains that may be immunocompromised or otherwise less hearty than wild type strains, still involves a number of risks. A great deal is at stake in terms of animal lives and health, as well as researchers' invested time and money. Potential pitfalls include temperature-related stress and dehydration, so aside from choosing the best possible shipping method, the shippers also need to carefully select the containers to be used and ensure that moisture sources are provided. Once animals are received, even when accompanied by a clean bill of health, there remains the possibility that they may harbor one or more adventitious microorganisms, which could not only interfere with their use in research, but could also infect other colonies at the receiving institution. The 'Product Focus' on p. 29 provides information on supplies and services that will be of interest to laboratory animal professionals needing to ship or receive rodents, including different types of shipping containers, moisture sources, and quarantine services.

As more and more genetically modified rodent strains are produced, there are more animals that need to be genotyped. It is not always possible to differentiate between wild type animals and heterozygotes by looking at the phenotype, and so author Techel and colleagues (p. 33) present a non-radioactive technique, combining PCR and capillary electrophoresis, for quickly and accurately distinguishing between wild type mice and those heterozygous for an insertional point mutation. While they demonstrate the technique with a model used in immunological and vascular research, this method could readily be adapted to work with other strains to assist in the determination of suitable breeding pairs.

There's no question that, on average, Americans are living longer and longer. During the 20th Century, the average lifespan in the US increased by 30 years, and in developed countries, more than 75% of deaths occur in people over the age of 75. With an aging population comes an increased need to understand the normal aging process, as well as aging-related diseases, such as Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. While a great deal is known about aging (e.g., that, at least in some species, reducing food intake leads to increase lifespan), much more is still unknown. Rodents are used extensively in biogerontology research, so caretakers need to be aware of special factors involved in their care and use in research. Author Nadon (p. 36) provides advice on caring for such animals, and includes information regarding special considerations for experimental design, husbandry, and environmental enrichment.

Finally, as autumn approaches, so does that time of year when USDA-licensed institutions must submit their annual reports. Completion and filing of these reports is often accompanied by confusion and distress on the part of those individuals charged with the task. On p. 25, authors Willems and Nelson try to alleviate some of the pressure by providing helpful tips for avoiding common pitfalls.

On a separate note, we would like to thank all of you who took time out of your busy schedule to respond to our online reader survey a few months back. We received extremely valuable feedback, and are in the process of implementing many of your ideas. To continue providing our readers with high-quality, relevant content, it is vital that we know what our readers would like to see us cover. We welcome your comments and suggestions for future content; please feel free to contact us with feedback or ideas at editors@labanimal.com.