

THE HISTORY OF FELASA – 1978-2018

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The Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA) has a membership of 21 independent European national and regional laboratory animal science associations. It can speak for laboratory animal scientists and technologists in at least 28 countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. A Board consisting of Officers and representatives of its constituent associations manages FELASA. Established in 1978, it has significantly grown over the years and is recognised both at European and international levels.

After 40 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. The joint meeting in 1978 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 LAS 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). In later editions the name was changed to FELASA Congress. In 2007, the FELASA triennial Award was instituted to recognize and reward a defined piece of original scientific work on any aspect of laboratory animal science, housing, husbandry or welfare that could lead or has led to changes or improvements into how animals are utilized in research, testing or education within Europe and that is consistent with FELASA's aims and objectives.

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The organization of the 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. It was generally agreed that the Federation should become more active and a meeting was therefore convened in October that same year to see how this could be done.

This 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. 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 was represented. 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 Board of Management are free to concentrate on wider and longer term issues.

In pursuing its aim of achieving European recognition, it had to be recognised that there are differences in structure and working practice between the Council of Europe (CoE) in Strasbourg and the European Commission (EC) 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 sought 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 a 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. In 2014, Patri Vergara, President of ICLAS and Jan-Bas Prins, President of FELASA, signed the agreement to form a liaison body composed of members of both organisations. A similar agreement was struck with the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) three years earlier in 2011. Both liaison bodies are tasked to explore and develop activities of mutual interest that may benefit the global progress in any area of laboratory animal science. This may be achieved by cooperation in working groups, scientific meetings, and any other joint activity that is considered appropriate.

Upon the initiative of Timo Nevalainen, an application for the funding of a research network on "Laboratory Animal Science and Welfare" was submitted to COST². The grant was awarded and COST Action B-24 began its activities in March 2004 and came to an end in April 2009 with the publication of a manual³. Many participants had links with national LAS associations and with FELASA with which the Action has collaborated closely throughout.

² COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology (<http://www.cost.eu>)

³ "The COST Manual of Laboratory Animal Care and Use: Refinement, Reduction, and Research". 2011. Eds: Bryan Howard, Timo Nevalainen and Gemma Perretta. CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, USA. ISBN: 978-1-4398-2492-4

There are many other issues on which FELASA advises and you will find FELASA recommendations, guidelines, reports and policy documents on the FELASA website (www.felasa.eu). Topics are identified by members of FELASA's constituting member (LAS) associations. Terms of Reference are drafted and specialist working groups are formed by the Board of Management upon consultation of the members of the constituting member associations. Laboratory Animals (LA) is FELASA's official journal. Hence working group reports, recommendations and guidelines are published in LA. Exceptions have been made for reports from joint AALAS-FELASA working groups.

The strength of FELASA publication is largely because it can speak for such a wide cross section of European laboratory animal scientists. When it has settled its policy, guidance or recommendation by debate among its member associations, it can promote those with considerable authority. It is the European body most suitable to define, periodically review and to promote the best possible practice in all aspects of laboratory animal science.

Acknowledgement:

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ANNEXES

FELASA Presidents

1978 – 1981	“GV-SOLAS President”
1981 – 1984	Karl Johan Öbrink
1987	Marga A.G. Kuipers
	Claes Rehbinder
	Peter Thoma
	Philip O’Donoghue
1996 – 1998	Patrick Hardy
1999 – 2001	Jann Hau
2002 – 2003	Timo Nevalainen
2004	Derek Forbes
2005 – 2006	Merel Ritskes – Hoitinga
2007 – 2008	Gemma Perretta
2009 – 2010	Javier Guillen
2011 – 2012	David Smith
2013 – 2014	Jan-Bas Prins
2015 – 2016	Heinz Brandstetter
2017 – 2018	Hanna-Marja Voipio
2019 – 2020	Ana Isabel Santos
2021 – 2022	Belen Pintado
2023 – 2024	Klas Abelson
2025 – 2026	J-P Mocho
2027 – 2028	Livia D’Angelo

FELASA International Congresses

- 1st Congress: “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 Congress: “Second FELASA Symposium”, Malmö, Sweden. 16-21 June 1984.
Organised by Scand-LAS.
Only Programme and Abstracts available.
- 3rd Congress: “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 Congress: “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 Congress: “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 Congress: “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 Congress: “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 Congress: “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 Congress: “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 and available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 10th Congress: “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 Congress: “New Paradigms in Laboratory Animal Science”, Helsinki, Finland. 14-17 June 2010. Organised by Scand-LAS. Abstracts are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 12th Congress: “Animal Research: Better Science from Fewer Animals”, Barcelona, Spain. 10-13 June 2013. Organised by SECAL. Abstracts and Program are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 13th Congress: “Brussels Revisited”, Brussels, Belgium. 13-16 June 2016. Organised with BCLAS, NVP and BV (Dutch Society for Animal technologists and Care takers). Abstracts and Program are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 14th Congress: “Back to the Future”, Prague, Czech Republic. 10-13 June 2019. Organised with CLASA. Abstracts and Program are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 15th Congress: “Communication in animal research”, Marseilles, France. 13-16 June 2022. Organised with AFSTAL. Abstracts and Program are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 16th Congress: “Reducing severity in animal research”, Athens, Greece. 2-5 June 2025. Organised with HSBLAS. Abstracts and Program are available on <https://felasa.eu/about-us/library>
- 17th Congress: “Innovation, Ethics, and the 3Rs in a Changing World”, Cologne, Germany. 7-10 June 2027. Organised with GV-SOLAS.

FELASA Award winners

2007	Paul Flecknell
2010	Michael Festing
2013	Timo Nevalainen
2016	Bryan Howard
2019	Werner Nicklas
2022	David Smith
2025	David Anderson