

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0901

December 1, 2017

Linda S. Birnbaum, Ph.D.
Director, National Toxicology Program
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
111 T.W. Alexander Drive
Durham, NC 27709

Dear Dr. Birnbaum:

I am writing regarding the National Toxicology Program's (NTP) plans for animal testing of the herbal supplement dong quai. Among other things, dong quai is used to induce so-called "herbal abortions."¹

NTP's website indicates that dong quai was originally selected for animal testing in 2008, and that nine separate animal tests are still planned.² Some of the tests apparently involve "force-feeding pregnant rats massive doses of the compound and then killing the animals, cutting out their fetuses and dissecting them."¹ While I value scientific research, this sounds like a ghoulish and horrifying misuse of taxpayer dollars. Who is being served by this research? What does the NTP hope to learn?

The NTP has acknowledged that "Animal-based testing has a number of recognized limitations: it can be expensive and time consuming, it raises moral and ethical issues, and it does not always identify toxic effects relevant to humans."³ NTP has also stated that alternatives to animal tests can often provide the "same result, but cheaper and faster."⁴ Given these statements, are there any humane alternatives to these tests?

¹ Hackbarth, Alyssa. "Taxpayers Are Funding Animal Tests for Homemade Abortions." Weekly Standard, The Weekly Standard, 28 June 2017, www.weeklystandard.com/taxpayers-are-funding-animal-tests-for-homemade-abortions/article/2008659

² Testing Status of Dong quai. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2 Nov. 2017, ntp.niehs.nih.gov/testing/status/agents/ts-08032.html.

³ Casey, Warren. "The U.S. Strategic Roadmap: New Approaches to Evaluate the Safety of Chemicals and Medical Products." Presentation at the Scientific Advisory Committee on Alternative Toxicological Methods meeting, 18 Sept 2017, https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/about_ntp/sacatm/2017/september/materials/roadmap_casey_508.pdf

⁴ Casey, Warren. "Developing a Strategy and Roadmap to Replace the Use of Animals for Toxicity Testing." Presentation at ICCVAM Public Forum, 25 May 2016, <https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/iccvam/meetings/iccvam-forum-2016/2-niceatm-508.pdf>

Nearly a decade has passed since these inhumane tests were first planned and scheduled. I am skeptical of their necessity, their scientific value, and whether they would provide useful information about dong quai's safety in pregnant women, or others who consume the substance.

In light of these concerns, please provide my office with the following information:

- **Timing:** When are the NTPs tests on dong quai scheduled to begin?
- **Cost:** How much will each of the nine remaining tests cost taxpayers?
- **Animal Use:** How many animals will be used in each test? In what USDA pain category will each test be classified? Is there any way to perform these tests without using animals?
- **Location:** Where will the tests be conducted?
- **Re-evaluation:** Will these animal testing plans be re-assessed in view of recent research on dong quai, and developments in alternatives to animal testing that have taken place since 2008?

Thank you for your cooperation, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress