

Food giants caught in animal testing scandal

- **Nestle, Unilever, Knorr, Hellmann's and Yakult accused of animal testing**
- **Campaign group claims tests were not to assess food safety but to allow the companies to make health claims about their products**

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Rabbits, piglets and mice are being killed when heavily pregnant, injected with deadly bacteria and bled to death by food firms testing fashionable superfoods, it has emerged.

The experiments involve food giants including KitKat maker Nestle, Unilever - the owners of PG tips - Knorr, Hellmann's and Yakult, the maker of probiotic drinks.

Food companies stress that animals are used as little as possible and are cared for to the highest standard.



According to the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) animals including rabbits, rats, mice and piglets suffered as a result of the growing fascination with so-called 'superfoods'

But the campaign group that uncovered details of the experiments, which were carried out over the past two years, claim that most were not done to assess the safety of the food.

Instead, they say the tests appear to have been carried out to allow the companies make health claims about their products.

Examples given by the BUAV include a Unilever experiment in which piglets were given an extract of Lipton's tea to see if it could counter diarrhoea caused by the Ecoli stomach bug.

Eight of the month-old animals died, with severe diarrhoea to blame in at least seven of the cases.



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Rabbits were historically used to test new medical treatments such as anesthetics

In another paper, also published in a scientific journal, Nestle scientists investigating the health benefits of goji berries, a vitamin-rich ‘superfood’, gave mice a powder based on the sweet red fruit.

The animals were then injected with acid to produce the symptoms of bowel disease before being killed and dissected.

‘It is unacceptable that animals should be made to suffer by companies in an effort to make “health benefit” claims about their

products'

- Dr

Katy Taylor

And in experiments into whether the 'friendly bacteria' found in Yakult's probiotic drinks can help ease the effects of a bad diet, mice bled to death after having their hearts punctured.

Unilever is also named by the BUAV for experiments involving *Hoodia gordonii* (CORR), a spiny cactus used by tribesmen of the Kalahari desert to stave off hunger pangs and seen as a potential appetite suppressant in the weight-conscious western world.

To test the safety of the plant in pregnancy, it was fed to pregnant rabbits, which were then killed just before they were due to give birth.

The BUAV says that obesity should be tackled through lifestyle changes, rather than 'quick fixes' such as pills and supplements.



Animal testing is common for food and beauty companies, yet many claim it is for safety reasons. This image was taken in 1996 in Maryland and shows a macaque being subjected to tests at the Poolesville Primate Center

It says that other products that are already in use, such as tea, or probiotic yoghurt, could be tested by on the people who regularly eat or drink them.

A spokesman said: ‘This type of research is not only cruel but it is also unnecessary.

‘As well as preventing the suffering of thousands of animals, human studies can provide a more realistic and human-relevant approach to assessing the health benefits of food.’

Dr Katy Taylor, the BUAV's head of science, said: 'The public will be shocked to learn these well-known and familiar high street brands are involved in sickening experiments on animals.'

'It is unacceptable that animals should be made to suffer by companies in an effort to make "health benefit" claims about their products.'



Major names including Unilever, Nestle, Yakult and Danone have allegedly been involved in 'sickening' tests on animals

'The BUAV is calling on such food giants to stop testing their food products and ingredients on animals.'

A spokesman for Nestle said that one of the firm's focuses of research is foods that help people with medical conditions including bowel problems.

He added: 'Nestlé does not use animal testing to develop conventional foods and drinks, such as coffee, tea, cereal and chocolate.'

‘However, animal studies are critically important to make advances in fundamental nutrition and health science.

‘This research helps to provide the scientific basis for developing novel ingredients, or new nutritional strategies for improving health and wellness.

‘This includes medical foods that help people with acute and chronic medical conditions.’

Unilever said it does not test tea or tea-based products on animals. If tests are required by law for safety reasons, they are kept to a minimum and carried out by third parties.

The firm said it is ‘committed to the elimination of animal testing’.

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