

Preface

The Concerted Action Vegetal Estrogens in Nutrition and Skeleton (VENUS, contract n° FAIR-98-4456) received a contribution through the FAIR programme (Agriculture and Fisheries), within the Fourth Framework Programme for RTD of the European Communities.

The main objective of this Concerted Action was to create a European network to stimulate discussions and exchanges of know-how in the field of vegetal estrogens. According to the results of the project, the amount of vegetal estrogens (particularly isoflavones) in the diet of European countries is very low if compared to Asian countries. This makes it difficult to prove so far any evident benefit of vegetal estrogens in respect to health, for instance osteoporosis. On the other hand, the project produced a useful platform for dissemination of project results. One of the most visible results was indeed the development of a database on substances with estrogenic and antiestrogenic compounds in foods. The information in the database is easily accessible to the external world at the website of the VENUS project (www.venus-ca.org). This is considered an important

achievement, since results of European projects should be widely disseminated. In addition to this, the project has stimulated additional research projects which were funded within the Fifth Framework Programme for RTD.

The co-ordinator of the project, Dr Francesco Branca from the Istituto Nazionale di Ricerca per gli Alimenti e la Nutrizione (INRAN), was very active in putting together European expertise in the field and in stimulating debate on the issue of vegetal estrogens. The consortium worked very hard during the three years of the contract and the results of their work is now available in this issue of the British Journal of Nutrition. I congratulate them on the work which has been carried out.

I am sure that readers of this issue will find information useful so as to increase their knowledge in this field and to possibly develop new interactions in the European Research Area.

Liam Breslin
Head: Unit E-2, Food Quality
Research DG, European Commission