Public Support for the Use of Animals in Research:
Effects Genetic Modification and Number of Animals Used

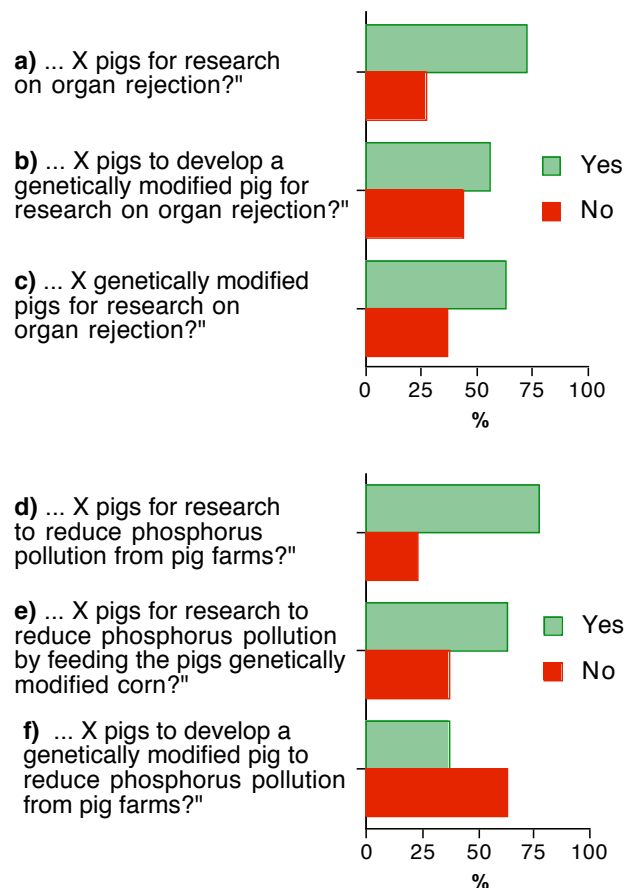*Catherine A. Schuppli, Carla Molento & **Daniel M. Weary***

Background & Aim

- The number of animals used in research has been on the rise since 1990, driven by increased use of genetically modified (GM) animals. Little is known about public acceptance to this changing pattern of research animal use. It is commonly assumed that the use of animals in research is more likely to be accepted if fewer animals are required.

- Aim: to test whether people's willingness to accept the use of animals for research is influenced by the number of animals required for experiments and whether they are genetically modified.

Methods & Results

- 417 people responded to a series of questions (see Figure) using an interactive web-based survey.

- Most supported the use of non-GM pigs, both for research to improve organ transplant success in humans (Question **a**), and to reduce agricultural pollution (**d**).

- Fewer supported animal use for organ transplant research when this required the creation of a GM strain (**a** vs. **b**), but support improved if an existing GM line was used (**b** vs. **c**).

- Fewer agreed with animal use for research to reduce pollution when this required feeding GM corn (**d** vs. **e**), and fewer still agreed if the research required the creation of a GM line (**d** vs. **f**).

- Increasing animal numbers from 100 to 1000 pigs reduced support for the use of GM pigs in the organ transplant study; no other effects of animal numbers were significant.

"Would you support the use of ...

a) ... X pigs for research on organ rejection?"

b) ... X pigs to develop a genetically modified pig for research on organ rejection?"

c) ... X genetically modified pigs for research on organ rejection?"

Yes / No

d) ... X pigs for research to reduce phosphorus pollution from pig farms?"

e) ... X pigs for research to reduce phosphorus pollution by feeding the pigs genetically modified corn?"

f) ... X pigs to develop a genetically modified pig to reduce phosphorus pollution from pig farms?"

Yes / No

***X** was randomly assigned as 10, 100, or 1000 pigs*

Conclusions

- Support for the use of animals in research declined when the study required the creation of new GM line, especially for certain types of research. The number of animals required had little effect on public support.