

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

September 10, 2025

Michael I. Kotlikoff, V.M.D, Ph.D.
President
Cornell University

Via e-mail: president@cornell.edu

Dear President Kotlikoff:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 10 million members and supporters globally, over 370,000 of whom live in New York State. Cornell University has maintained a Public Health Service-approved Animal Welfare Assurance for decades. This assurance requires adherence to the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, including implementing the 3Rs principle: replacing animal use whenever possible, reducing the number of animals used, and refining procedures to minimize suffering.

Despite this, the university continues to use thousands of animals in its laboratories. A recent inventory reported that Cornell used more than 21,000 mice, 278 rats, and over 20,500 fishes in experiments. A 2024 federal report also documented the school's use of 198 dogs, 79 cats, 134 hamsters, 13 rabbits, 39 sheep, 41 pigs, and 10,556 other Animal Welfare Act (AWA)-covered species in its laboratories. According to reports filed by Cornell with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the number of AWA-covered animals used in experiments skyrocketed by a staggering **214.2%** from 2020 to 2024. These figures directly contradict the university's assurance to the federal government that it would reduce animal use, exposing a troubling disregard for its stated commitment to adopting non-animal replacements and reducing reliance on animal experimentation.

What exactly is Cornell's plan to implement the 3Rs? You have used and killed animals for years with apparently no end in sight, despite your claim to abide by the best practices. We believe the public has the right to know if the university's pledge has been truthful.

Tax dollars wasted on cruel and ineffective research

In 2024, Cornell University received over \$102 million in taxpayer funding from the National Institutes of Health—approximately half of which was directed toward experiments on animals. These experiments include highly invasive procedures in which experimenters used 8- to 10-week-old female rats to test miniature [human breast implants](#). They cut open the rats' backs, inserted two implants under their skin, and stitched them in place.

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Over 12 weeks, some rats endured implants that moved, rotated, or even flipped out of position, all before experimenters ultimately killed all the rats and dissected their bodies. In another laboratory, experimenters forced mice to [binge on alcohol](#) for eight weeks while limiting their access to water. The mice were subjected to a battery of tests, including the tail suspension test, in which experimenters hung the mice by their tails—a painful and distressing position. In the forced swim test, experimenters dropped the mice into inescapable water-filled cylinders, causing them to swim frantically to avoid drowning.

You must be aware that numerous studies dating back more than two decades reveal the failure of animal experiments to lead to cures and treatments for human beings. Conferences, papers, and all manner of information sources show the availability of countless superior, non-animal research methods that produce far more reliable and species-relevant results for human health than experiments on animals. PETA scientists' [Research Modernization Now](#) provides a detailed strategy for replacing experiments on animals with humane and human-relevant methods. Have you read it, and what is your plan to implement it or alternative solutions to this burgeoning use of animals on your campus?

Failure to comply with federal animal welfare regulations and guidelines

Cornell University has repeatedly failed to comply with minimum federal animal welfare regulations and guidelines, as evidenced by multiple violations documented in federal reports. In recent years, laboratory staff administered three different types of expired drugs to approximately 910 mice. In another case, a suspected incorrect dose of influenza virus given to several mice resulted in 32 becoming dehydrated and lethargic, while seven died or had to be euthanized. Laboratory staff also failed to conduct proper post-infection observations as the mice's health deteriorated. A recurring issue has been the failure to provide adequate food and/or water to animals, leading to dehydration and death. These chronic failures underscore the incompetence and negligence of staff who consistently fail to meet even the most basic animal welfare standards—and reflect a blatant disregard for both the law and the will of the American public.

Cornell's failure to adhere to the 3Rs principles undermines public trust. We ask you to address this matter of public interest without delay. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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