



October 21, 2025

Bryan Sakuma
Chair

U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Kasey Cronquist
President

U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Via e-mails: bryans@sakumabros.com; kcronquist@blueberry.org

Dear Mr. Sakuma and Mr. Cronquist,

Thank you in advance for your time. I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 10.4 million members and supporters globally. **Based on the information presented below, we urge that you please prohibit the funding of animal testing, in favor of modern, human-relevant research methods.**

Since last year, two animal experiments funded by the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) have been presented and/or published. In one experiment, experimenters force-fed mice human feces from postmenopausal women with high blood pressure, force-fed them blueberries, and repeatedly took their blood.¹ In the other experiment, experimenters injected a chemical into the rats' knee joint to induce painful osteoarthritis, fed them blueberries, starved them, took their blood, severed their arteries to kill them, and dissected their knee joints.² These experiments are purportedly meant to show blueberries' human health benefits for high blood pressure and osteoarthritis in order for USHBC to better market blueberries to consumers. However, these experiments are unnecessary and unscientific.

Blueberries are a common human food. Given there is no toxicity concern, researchers could have safely conducted these studies on humans, which—unlike animals—would yield clinically-relevant results. Many review papers on clinical studies on blueberries' effects on high blood pressure/cardiovascular

¹ Ghanem N, Lee SY, Woolf EK, Zhang Z, Price JD, Ramer-Tait AE, Gentile CL, Rodriguez-Mateos A, Weir TL, Johnson SA. Essential Role of Gut Microbiome in Determining Circulating Levels of Blueberry Polyphenol Metabolite Exposure. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2024 Jul 1;8.

² South SM, Crabtree K, Averitt DL, Vijayagopal P, Juma S. Anti-Inflammatory and Joint-Protective Effects of Blueberries in a Monosodium Iodoacetate (MIA)-Induced Rat Model of Osteoarthritis. *Nutrients*. 2025 Jun 27;17(13):2134.

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Washington

1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles

2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk

501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Entities

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

diseases^{3,4,5,6} and osteoarthritis^{7,8,9,10} have already been published. Also, advanced *in vitro* and computational models are widely used for researching mechanisms and safety of the effect of food on human health.

Animals are scientifically unfit “models” for human food research, given the numerous pathophysiological differences between species.¹¹ Federal science and regulatory agencies have openly acknowledged the failures of animal testing and are moving away from it, in alignment with PETA's Research Modernization NOW, which is a strategic framework for human-relevant science.¹²

- *Food and Drug Administration (FDA)*: The FDA announced on April 10, 2025, a "groundbreaking step to advance public health by replacing animal testing in the development of monoclonal antibody therapies and other drugs with more effective, human-relevant methods," to "improve drug safety and accelerate the evaluation process, while reducing animal experimentation, lowering research and development (R&D) costs, and ultimately, drug prices."¹³
- *The National Institutes of Health (NIH)*: The NIH, the world's largest public funder for biomedical research¹⁴— announced a major new initiative on April 29, 2025, "to expand innovative, human-based science while reducing animal use in research."¹⁵ On May 4, 2025, the agency closed its in-house beagle lab, where dogs were used in sepsis and pneumonia

³ Zhu Y, Sun J, Lu W, Wang X, Han Z, Qiu C. Effects of blueberry supplementation on blood pressure: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. *Journal of Human Hypertension*. 2017 Mar;31(3):165-71.

⁴ Delpino FM, Dos Santos FS, Flores TR, Cerqueira HS, Santos HO. The effects of blueberry and cranberry supplementation on blood pressure in patients with cardiovascular diseases: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. *Phytotherapy Research*. 2024 Feb;38(2):646-61.

⁵ Deng B, Lei Y, Zhou R, Ruan T, Lu W, Ying J, Yue Y, Mu D. Effect of blueberry intervention on endothelial function: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Physiology*. 2024 Jun 3;15:1368892.

⁶ Miraghajani M, Momenyan S, Arab A, Dehkordi AH, Symonds ME. Blueberry and cardiovascular disease risk factors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*. 2020 Sep 1;53:102389.

⁷ Pomilio AB, Szweczek NA, Duchowicz PR. Dietary anthocyanins balance immune signs in osteoarthritis and obesity—update of human *in vitro* studies and clinical trials. *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*. 2024 Apr 2;64(9):2634-72.

⁸ Basu A, Schell J, Scofield RH. Dietary fruits and arthritis. *Food & function*. 2018;9(1):70-7.

⁹ Jones DR. Blueberry polyphenols and their effects on bone and joint. *Adv. Food Technol. Nutr. Sci. Open J*. 2016;2(1):143-9.

¹⁰ Valsamidou E, Gioxari A, Amerikanou C, Zoumpoulakis P, Skarpas G, Kaliora AC. Dietary interventions with polyphenols in osteoarthritis: a systematic review directed from the preclinical data to randomized clinical studies. *Nutrients*. 2021 Apr 23;13(5):1420.

¹¹ PETA. Critiques of Animal Testing for Human Health Claims. n.d. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Critiques-of-Animal-Testing-for-Human-Health-Claims.pdf>

¹² PETA. Research Modernization NOW. November 2024. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Research-Modernization-NOW-Biomedical.pdf>

¹³ US FDA. FDA Announces Plan to Phase Out Animal Testing Requirement for Monoclonal Antibodies and Other Drugs. April 10, 2025. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-announces-plan-phase-out-animal-testing-requirement-monoclonal-antibodies-and-other-drugs>

¹⁴ NIH. Grants & funding. January 21, 2025. <https://www.nih.gov/grants-funding>

¹⁵ NIH. NIH to prioritize human-based research technologies. April 29, 2025. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-prioritize-human-based-research-technologies>

experiments.¹⁶ On May 23, 2025, the agency terminated funding for Harvard experiments that involved sewing shut the eyes of baby monkeys and subjecting them to visual deprivation.¹⁷ On May 28, 2025, the NIH launched a new autism research funding opportunity that explicitly excludes animal experiments.¹⁸ On July 7, 2025, they announced during a joint webinar with the FDA that NIH will no longer seek proposals exclusively for animal models.¹⁹ Dr. Nicole Kleinstreuer, the Acting NIH Deputy Director for Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, and a leader in reliable and human-relevant non-animal testing, emphasized that improving human health, "cannot be fulfilled using outdated animal-based models that fail to translate to human outcomes." Dr. Kleinstreuer also stated that "[w]e are very well placed to move away from animal-based models."²⁰ On July 9, 2025, the NIH announced the early expiration of a funding opportunity for monkey experiments, which had involved injecting pregnant monkeys with viruses and dissecting their offspring.^{21,22}

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the European Food Safety Authority, and the Food Directorate of Health Canada, and others do not require or accept studies on animals as standalone evidence in order to make health claims.²³ Rather, they require human tests, which are the gold standard for establishing a substance/disease relationship, and they emphasize that such evidence can only come from human tests.

Relatedly, several agricultural commodity research and promotion boards, also known as "checkoffs," have recognized the limitations of animal testing and that they should not squander assessment fees from hard working farmers on such outdated practices. After more than 85,000 consumers contacted the Hass Avocado Board,²⁴ it adopted a new public policy stating that it "does not support, fund, or conduct animal research."²⁵ Similarly, in response to PETA's public

¹⁶ Fox News. NIH closes experimentation labs accused of brutally killing thousands of beagles for 40+ years. July 15, 2025. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/nih-closes-experimentation-labs-accused-brutally-killing-thousands-beagles-40-years>

¹⁷ NIH [@NIH]. [IH has terminated funding at Harvard University for studies that included sewing the eyes of young monkeys shut....] [Post]. X. May 29, 2025. <https://x.com/NIH/status/1928136701429284991>

¹⁸ NIH. Autism Data Science Initiative: Funding opportunities. June 30, 2025. <https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/autism-data-science-initiative/funding-opportunities>

¹⁹ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. NIH and FDA urged to adopt non-animal toxicology test methods. n.d. <https://www.peta.org/news/nih-fda-non-animal-toxicology-test-methods>

²⁰ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA & NIH workshop on reducing animal testing [Video]. YouTube. July 10, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/embed/FUWQ1V8Dl-c?feature=oembed&enablejsapi=1&origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.peta.org>

²¹ National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Notice of early expiration of PAR-23-073, "Mentored Career Development Program for Early Stage Investigators Using Nonhuman Primate Research Models (K01 Independent Clinical Trial Not Allowed)" (NOT-AI-25-040). July 9, 2025. <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-AI-25-040.html>

²² National Institutes of Health. PAR-23-225: HIV/AIDS Scholars Using Nonhuman Primate (NHP) Models Program (K01 Independent Clinical Trial Not Allowed). 2023. <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-23-225.html>

²³ PETA. Regulations on Human Health Claims for Foods. n.d. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Regulations-on-Human-Health-Claims-for-Foods.pdf>

²⁴ PETA. After Pressure From PETA, Hass Avocado Board Bans Animal Testing. n.d. <https://www.peta.org/about-peta/victories/hass-avocado-board-bans-animal-testing/>

²⁵ Avocado Nutrition Center. Research Opportunities. n.d. <https://research.loveonetoday.com/research-opportunities>

campaigns,^{26,27} the National Mango Board confirmed it “does not fund research studies involving animals ... and has no plans to do so in the future,”²⁸ and the National Watermelon Promotion Board explicitly prohibits “uncontrolled intervention studies, animal studies or in vitro studies.”²⁹ So far, more than 167,000 concerned consumers have urged USHBC to follow suit.^{30,31} More than 450 food and beverage companies and brands have also banned the conducting, funding, and commissioning of tests on animals unless explicitly required by law, after discussions with PETA.³²

Moving away from animal testing is the compassionate and scientifically advantageous thing to do, especially for common human foods like blueberries. We ask that you please follow the governmental, scientific, and industrial trend away from animal testing and prohibit the funding of animal testing, in favor of modern, human-relevant research methods.

Thank you for your consideration, and please reply by November 18, 2025. You can contact me via francesc@peta.org.

Sincerely yours,



Frances Cheng, PhD
Chief Scientist, International Laboratory Methods
Laboratory Investigations Department

²⁶ PETA. Victory! National Mango Board’s Seedy Tests on Rats and Mice End Following Pressure From PETA. August 13, 2024. <https://www.peta.org/news/national-mango-board-ends-tests-on-rats-and-mice>

²⁷ PETA. Victory! National Watermelon Board Ends Rotten Animal Tests After PETA Push. December 19, 2024. <https://www.peta.org/news/victory-national-watermelon-board-ends-rotten-animal-tests/>

²⁸ Mango.org. FAQs. n.d. <https://www.mango.org/frequently-asked-questions>

²⁹ Watermelon.org. Nutrition Research. n.d. <https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/industry/research/nutrition-research/>

³⁰ PETA. Animals Beheaded for Blueberries? ‘Farmer Tax’ Funds Cruel Tests. n.d. <https://support.peta.org/page/22117/action/1>

³¹ PETA. Starved, Douched, and Beheaded: Help End the Blueberry Council’s Cruel Tests. n.d. <https://support.peta.org/page/79426/action/1>

³² PETA. ‘Eat Without Experiments’ program. n.d. <https://eatwithoutexperiments.peta.org/>