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## Random Samples

**Volume 282, Number 5386, Issue of 02  
October 1998**

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## Good News for Guinea Pigs

▲ Turning a good idea for, say, a new deodorant into a product is often a painful journey--particularly for the lab animals that are sacrificed to show that a substance or chemical mixture is safe. Now a government panel has given its blessing to a new skin test that uses fewer animals, is more humane, and has even received high marks from animal rights groups.

The test, used to evaluate whether products will cause dermatitis, is the first to pass muster under a new federal program to help evaluate alternatives to current animal tests, called the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Validation of Alternative Methods (*Science*, 4 April 1997, p. 41). The committee oversees peer review of proposed tests and forwards recommendations to more than a dozen federal agencies, which then decide whether to adopt a test.

In the standard skin test, a substance is painted on a guinea

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pig, which is then injected with a chemical that aggravates any skin reaction. In the new test, developed by scientists from three companies, a substance is applied to a mouse's ear. The animal is euthanized a few days later, and its lymph node tissue is examined for signs of an immune reaction. This test "spares the animal any pain and suffering associated with allergic contact dermatitis," says Martin Stephens of the Humane Society of the United States.

The new test can't replace the old one in all cases, such as testing metal salts, says committee co-chair William Stokes. However, he says, it may yield better data, because scientists know more about the mouse immune system than about that of guinea pigs.



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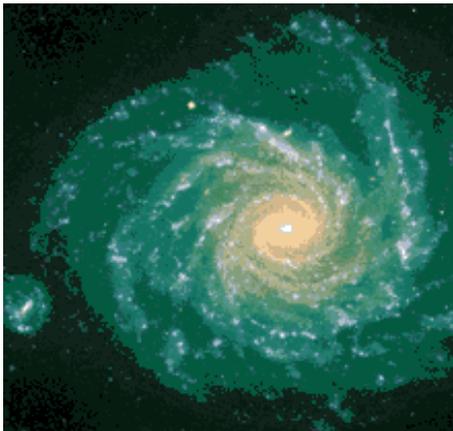
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## New Views of Southern Skies

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Hovering at the outermost spiral arms of NGC 1232--a colorful pinwheel galaxy 100 million light-years from Earth-- is a small, gravitationally distorted companion galaxy (lower left). In this image, captured by the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope (VLT) in Chile, old stars in the galaxy's core appear red; young star-forming regions in the spiral arms are blue. The image was taken by FORS, the VLT's first scientific instrument, which glimpsed first light on 15 September. With its acute vision and power to study the composition, velocities, and distances of galaxies, the German-built FORS, the observatory claims, will be a "workhorse for the study of the distant universe."