

EDITORIAL

Reflections and Challenges

The advent of 2004 gives us an opportunity to reflect on the high points—and challenges—faced by the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*. Many of these points were subjects of discussion and advice with the *Journal's* 33-person Advisory Board at the Fall National Meeting of the American Chemical Society in New York.

A dominant topic in 2003, and in fact in most of the recent years, has been the marked growth in the number of manuscripts received. We anticipate receiving approximately 2450 manuscripts in 2003, a 17% increase over 2002. This also represents a doubling since 1997 and a 5-fold increase since 1990, prompting the question, how high will it go before leveling off or reversing? Of more immediate concern, how do the *Journal's* other vital statistics fare under this high manuscript load? Obviously we do not know how high it will go, but increased research activity in agricultural and food chemistry in China, Europe (including now Eastern Europe), and South America, to mention a few of the growth spots, coupled with a worldwide interest in the “science of food and agriculture” would suggest that there is still significant growth ahead.

Although the number of manuscripts received increased in 2003, the average processing time, from receipt to print publication, stayed virtually the same as in 2002—about 27 weeks. This is the sum of the average times spent in initially “processing” the manuscript (15 days), searching for reviewers who agree to submit a review (11 days), submission and receipt of reviews (44 days), manuscript revision time by authors (44 days), final decision-making by the Editor/Associate Editor (6 days), and preparation of galley proofs and printing of the issue in which the manuscript appears (72 days). Manuscripts appear in the *Journal's* Web edition about 4 weeks sooner than they occur in print.

Electronic processing seems to hold the greatest potential for further reducing overall processing time; already over 65% of our manuscripts are submitted electronically just 2 years after the introduction of this option. With increased use of the Paragon system for submission, review, and revision of manuscripts, the entire process is being done electronically. This may allow us to shave off some more days from the processing time, which is clearly in the best interest of authors and editors alike because it allows for increased timeliness and impact of *JAFCh*! We will redouble our efforts to expedite unusually significant manuscripts—authors, please request this in your cover letter, with the reasons why “expedited review” is warranted.

The “impact” of *JAFCh* has increased, as evidenced by the ISI Impact Factor, which increased notably in 2002, the last complete year for which statistics are available, to 1.915 (vs

1.6 in 2001). This means that the average number of citations per article continued to rise, even though there has been a significant increase in the number of articles published in the *Journal*. *JAFCh* retained its number 1 ranking in the Agriculture, Applied Chemistry, and Food Science and Technology categories of *ISI Journal Citation Reports*. As of this writing, our most cited manuscripts published in 2002 were the following:

E. Tareke et al., Analysis of Acrylamide, a Carcinogen Formed in Heated Foodstuffs. *J. Agric. Food Chem.* **2002**, *50*, 4998–5006.

L. Sage et al., Fungal Flora and Ochratoxin A Production in Grapes and Musts from France. *J. Agric. Food Chem.* **2002**, *50*, 1306–1311.

Y. Hayasaka and R. E. Asenstorfer, Screening for Potential Pigments Derived from Anthocyanins in Red Wine Using Nano-electrospray Tandem Mass Spectrometry. *J. Agric. Food Chem.* **2002**, *50*, 756–761.

In addition, more than 20 articles received news media attention in 2003, exemplified by S. Gorinstein et al., Structural Changes in Plasma Circulating Fibrogen after Moderate Beer Consumption As Determined by Electrophoresis and Spectroscopy, *J. Agric. Food Chem.* **2003**, *51*, 822–827. This research received coverage in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chemistry in Britain*, *Science News*, and other periodicals. It pointed out the potential health benefits of moderate beer consumption, to the apparent delight of brewers and consumers! The *JAFCh* website has a special “In the News” webpage where these articles are listed, along with free access to their abstracts.

Occasionally a controversial paper will receive media attention, resulting in submission of a Comment by scientists with opposing viewpoints, which is published along with a Rebuttal from the authors of the original work. Both Comments and Rebuttals are peer reviewed. In this way the *Journal* can serve as a forum for scientific dialogue on controversial issues. Examples for 2003 can be found in the July 16 (truffle aroma analysis) and August 13 (digestibility of food allergens) issues, as well as a pair published elsewhere in this issue regarding comparative studies for total phenolics in crops produced using different agricultural practices.

JAFCh's rejection rate increased in 2003 in magnitude comparable to the increase experienced by many other ACS journals. Much of the increase was for manuscripts rejected prior to peer review, primarily for those “judged to be outside the scope of the *Journal*” or “fragmentary and marginally incremental, or lacking in significance” per the *Journal's* published *Scope, Policy, and Instructions for Authors* (published elsewhere

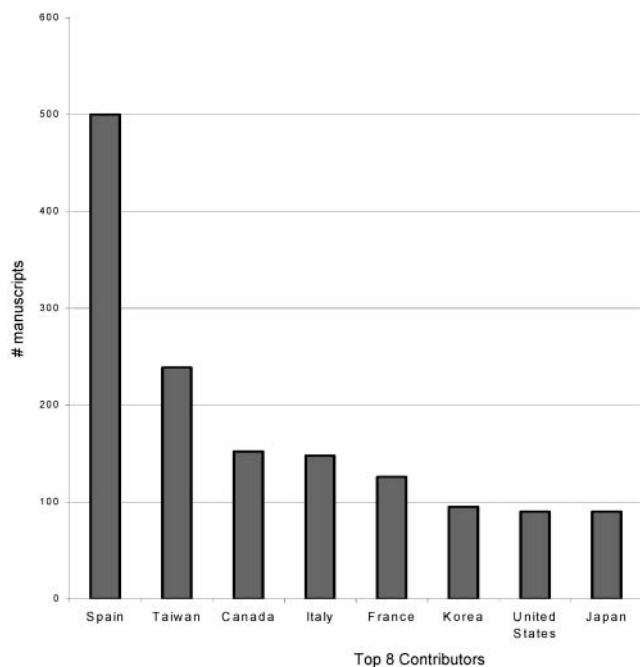


Figure 1. Manuscript receipt per 10⁸ capita.



Figure 2. Editor James N. Seiber (center) with Advisory Board members Takayuki Shibamoto (left) and Chi-Tang Ho (right). Dr. Ho and Dr. Shibamoto were recognized along with Donald Mottram (not pictured) as Top Reviewers at the *JAF*C Advisory Board meeting, held at the Fall 2003 National Meeting of the American Chemical Society in New York.

in this issue). Authors who have questions about the *Journal's* scope, particularly when their manuscript is heavily dosed with nutrition, toxicology, horticultural characteristics, or nonchemical aspects of food science and technology, are encouraged to contact me prior to submitting. We welcome such information in *JAF*C manuscripts, but it must be accompanied by substantial amounts of chemistry/biochemistry, as per the *Journal's* published scope. We all recognize that a rejection can be difficult to handle on the receiving end!

The *Journal's* demographics continue to favor, by a considerable margin (81%), manuscripts submitted from outside the United States. To put this into perspective, we have plotted the manuscripts submitted, adjusted for population of the nation from which submitted, versus the top eight contributing nations (Figure 1). The results reinforce the importance of agricultural



Figure 3. Editor and Associate Editors for the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, taken at the Fall 2003 National Meeting of the American Chemical Society in New York: front row, left to right, Marshall Phillips, James N. Seiber, Willis Wheeler; back row, left to right, Peter Schieberle, John W. Finley, Russell Molyneux.

and food chemistry in Spain, Taiwan, and other nations outside North America.

Locating peer reviewers is a continuing challenge as the number of manuscripts received continues to increase. The actual number of reviewers for 2003 will be over 3200, versus 2824 in 2002, which is the result of increased numbers of manuscripts, but also a reflection of our efforts to get at least three completed reviews per manuscript to ensure quality. Improving the quality and consistency of reviews is another challenge. In an effort to assist reviewers as they consider the scientific merits of manuscripts, a reviewer checklist, suggested by Associate Editor Russell Molyneux and refined by all of our Associate Editors, has been placed on the Paragon System Reviewer Information webpage for the *Journal*.

Some reviewers are going the extra step of handling many manuscripts each year. Special thanks to our "workhorse reviewers" for 2003—Chi-Tang Ho, Takayuki Shibamoto, Thomas Hoffman, Mendel Friedman, Donald Mottram, Lanfranco Conte, Varoujan Yaylan, and Richard Stadler. The 2003 Advisory Board meeting in New York gave us an opportunity to acknowledge these scientists with awards, with three receiving their recognition in person (Figure 2).

In fact, thanks are due to a lot of people, somewhere around 10,000 in total, including authors, reviewers, Advisory Board members, Associate Editors (Figure 3), and ACS and editorial office staff, not to mention those who subscribe to and use the *Journal* worldwide. I especially acknowledge our Advisory Board members and Associate Editors, whose names appear on the masthead page of this issue, and the too often unsung heroes in our editorial offices: Ann Ray, Danielle Neff, and Loreen Kleinschmidt, who work in my office, Sharon Martini (who prepared many of the statistics cited in this column), Heija Wheeler, Julie Rossetti, Fe Molyneux, and Birgit Schieberle.

We look forward to the new year with great anticipation, and we wish you a most enjoyable and successful 2004!

James N. Seiber
Editor