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## Foreword

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Phytoestrogens, i.e. endogenous plant constituents with estrogenic activity, occur in numerous plants used for human and animal nutrition. Although some phytoestrogens have been known for more than five decades, the scientific and public interest in these compounds has surged only during recent years. This is mainly due to epidemiologic and experimental studies suggesting that phytoestrogens protect against hormone-dependent cancer, e.g. of the breast and prostate, and also against cardiovascular problems. These putative health effects make phytoestrogens interesting candidates for dietary supplements. On the other hand, reports on adverse effects of phytoestrogens on animal reproduction and other toxicological data have raised concern about the safety of these bioactive compounds.

This “Special Issue” provides an overview of the

analytical methods used in the analysis of phytoestrogens. In addition, the bioavailability, metabolism, estrogenic and antiestrogenic activity as well as toxicological data are discussed in detail. The advancement of analytical and biological techniques will eventually allow to elucidate the mechanisms of action of these substances, which is essential for understanding why certain compounds may have beneficial while others may have adverse health effects.

We hope that the articles accumulated in this Special Issue may prove as an useful and inspiring source of information for everybody interested in the fascinating and multifaceted topic of phytoestrogens.

Manfred Metzler  
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