AGROBIOINSTITUTE

CODE OF ETHICS

The present Code of Ethics, hereinafter referred to as the Code, applies only to the activities of the scientists, PhD students, technical and administrative staff of the Agrobio Institute (ABI), regulating their scientific, educational and professional roles as employees of the Institute. Covers research, laboratory, technical and administrative work carried out at the institute: research, teaching, scientific guidance, consulting, review, publication, promotion, administration. The behavior of scientists, technical and administrative staff unrelated to their official duties is not governed by this Code of Ethics. The ABI's team voluntarily participates in the drafting of this Code, stating its readiness to adhere to to the principles set out therein. Any newly appointed employee - a scientist, PhD student, technical or administrative assistant - needs to be familiar with the contents of the Code upon entering the ABI. Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of ethical standards set out in the Code will not be considered as an excuse in case of unethical behavior.

Procedures for reporting, discussing, and resolving unethical behavior are described in the Rules and Procedures for the conduct of the Ethics Committee of ABI. Actions that violate the Ethical Standards set out in the Code are subject to a sanction.

The Code of Ethics aims to bring out a standard of professional behavior encoded in the practice already enforced in the community of researchers, postgraduates, technical and administrative staff at ABI, refining, updating and enriching it with basic bioethical principles. As a biotechnology research institute, ABI adopts general bioethical principles as a moral foundation for structuring the research in the institute. The Code is not a law, deviations, if any, are not considered as offenses.

Codification of Ethical Standards is necessary because of the following purposes:

(1) to demonstrate ethical principles that ABI members (scientists, technical and administrative assistants) adhere in the community and and observe with respect to the general public;

(2) to demonstrate the rules and standards that ABI members observe in the care of humanity and the environment and the principles of risk assessment;

(3) to resolve quickly and easily emerging morally conflicting situations in the ABI, regardless of their nature;

(4) to be the basis for a positive professional environment in ABI and to eliminate actions that can be defined as unfair, discriminatory and compromising the autonomy and authority of the person;

(5) to codify the principles of an ethical research process in each of its phases: research, reporting, training, sharing, reviewing, publishing, etc.

In the process of decision-making on its professional conduct, the ABI community of scientists, technical and administrative staff should consider this Code as a supplement to the applicable laws and regulations, relating to the specificity of scientific and administrative work, conducted in ABI (National and European legislation).

The Code identifies and arranges common ethical standards, rights and obligations of ABI members. Everyone is responsible for their own actions and as a member of ABI is collectively responsible for maintaining and adhering to the stated rules of conduct. In case of noticed non-compliance to principles and rules laid down in the Code, each member of the ABI is obliged to contact the Chairman of the Ethics Committee, constituted by this Code, in accordance with the procedure established.

I. PREAMBLE

The main task of ABI's research community is to produce new fundamental and applied knowledge in the field of plant and agro-biotechnology. ABI performs this task as a science strategy within the Agricultural Academy (AA), guided by the principles of honesty and responsibility to colleagues as well as to external users and participants in joint research activities. The researchers, postgraduates, technical and administrative staff, as members of the institute community are bound by this general obligation and are individually responsible for achieving the strategic goals of ABI.

ABI as a unit of the AA is a leading research center in Bulgaria in the field of plant and agro-biotechnology. ABI's activities include a wide range of fundamental and applied research

in various areas of the bio-economy related to classification and utilization of national bio-resources.

This Code of Ethics provides a common set of principles and standards on which ABI builds its professional and scientific work as an institute representing the Republic of Bulgaria at the International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) - Trieste, Italy, also as the Center of Excellence in Plant Biotechnology and a coordinator of the research and staff training in the field of plant biotechnology at national and regional level; as a member of the European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO); as a member of the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB) and a sub-regional center for Central and Eastern European countries in the field of regulation and control of GMOs.

This Code aims to provide specific standards for ethical issues in the knowledge production process in the field of plant and agro-biotechnology in context of their application as well as the possible moral-problematic situations that arise in the community of scientists, PhD students, the technical and administrative staff of ABI.

I. GENERAL BIOETHICAL PRINCIPLES

As a biotechnology organization, ABI abide by the following principles:

1. **Integrity -** honesty and respect for the truth.
2. **Usefulness, with minimal harm (Beneficience, non-malificence) -** achieve the best possible, with as little damage as possible**.**
3. **Respect for the autonomy of the person -** colleagues, partners, PhD students and students. Respect for autonomy, dignity and human rights**.**
4. **Legality** – compliance with relevant laws and standards, transparency in decision-making, demonstration of research and resources used.
5. **Justice -** recognition of wider public interests, beyond the interests of the individual entity and the institute. Ensuring fair access to resources for all participants in the research process.
6. **Respect for the subject of research -** ensuring the proper use of living organisms for research purposes.

Taking these basic principles into account, ABI is aspiring research for improving human well-being, quality of life, and environmental protection by following the more specific principles of:

1. Caution
2. Preserving ecosystems
3. Conservation of biodiversity
4. Promote modern and sustainable agriculture.

II. BASIC VALUES

The Code of Ethics for Researchers, PhDs, Technical and Administrative Staff is based on the core values that guide the behavior of each member of ABI.

1. Originality - production of a new knowledge in the field of plant and agro-biotechnology.

2. Universality - Contributions and scientific claims should not be evaluated on the basis of age, gender, race, authority or titles of those who achieve or formulate them.

3. Criticism - objective critique by the collegues, as an assessment of the qualities of the research result.

4. Disinterestedness - the scientific truth implies a disinterestedness of the researcher. It requires critical thinking, adherence to the facts, striving for the neutrality of assessments and the justification of arguments and principles.

5. Honesty - the pursuit of truth is complemented by a sincere and honest attitude in the search for and presentation of research results, as well as in interpersonal relationships at the institute, between colleagues at national and international level as well as in society.

6. Trust - mutual trust is a necessary basis for good research environment in the

AA units among European and international scientific institutions.

7. Loyalty - the members of the scientific community are devoted to develop and validate ABI, but retain their right to freedom of expression and professional development.

8. Transparency and openness - ABI management and members officially and openly announce and provide reliable information about the nature of their research, partners, results, and future development guidelines.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

We, members of the ABI team, declare our commitment to the basic principles of the European Charter of Scientists, the AA Code and the Code of Researchers in Bulgaria, which in this document are adopted and set forth as general principles of behavior of ABI members.

1. Freedom of Research - Institute collaborators direct their research to the benefit of society by expanding the boundaries of fundamental and applied knowledge in biological research, using freedom of thought and speech.

2. Professional responsibility - to the research subject, to the community of scientists and to society as a whole.

3. Mobility (geographic, intersectoral, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, virtual) - an important tool for improving the researcher's capacity and career development.

4. Continuous professional development - researchers at all stages of their career strive for their own improvement by regularly updating and expanding their skills and competences.

GENERAL RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

1. Collegiality and cooperativness: basic commitment of each associate is the treatment of the others with respect and willingness to cooperate.

1.1. Every researcher, technical, administrative assistant, or doctoral student at ABI should strive for a fair and tolerant attitude towards all colleagues based on mutual respect, cooperation, respect for foreign opinions.

1.2. Each member of the ABI should avoid discriminatory attitudes and insults by striving to provide equal opportunities to the other regardless of race, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious and political beliefs, health status, age, etc.

1.3. ABI members should treat each other in a way that does not harm the dignity and reputation of others, creates conflicts, violates their rights, including the right to privacy, and does not destroy the collectivity.

2. **Confidentiality**: ABI members may have access (receive and collect) in their activity a different type of confidential information that must be properly stored. In such cases, the following rules are applied:

2.1. Everyone is required to follow the relevant legal provisions, agreements with third parties and the policy of ABI to preserve the confidentiality of accessible information related to its activities.

2.2. No confidential information or part of it should be used for the purpose of pursuing personal benefit or to be granted to third parties.

2.3. No confidential or internal information for the functioning of the ABI should be used for purposes that are detrimental to its authority and the authority of its associates.

3. Conflict of Interest: When deciding on ABI's activities, everyone should approach with caution, be objective and unbiased. For this purpose, it should:

3.1. To avoid individual or institutional conflicts of interest.

3.2. Potential conflicts of interest to be declared.

3.3. To ensure that personal relationships do not affect the objectivity of judgment in ABI decisions as well as the scientific development and careers of its employees.

3.4. To cancel the participation of community's members in decision-making and decision-making procedures where their impartiality is not guaranteed or questioned.

4. **Resources use:** ABI is committed to responsible management of its resources.

4.1. Property, equipment, finance, materials, electronic systems can only be used for the purposes and activities of ABI.

4.2. ABI resources should not be used for personal use or by third parties without being regulated in the form of an agreement or service contract concluded with the ABI Management.

4.3. Each member of the community should seek to preserve and protect against potential damage to ABI's resources.

5. **Compliance with legal and other regulations:** Members of the community should conduct their activities in accordance with the existing laws, regulations and the rules of the institute in:

5.1. Entering into contractual relations when implementing various projects related to ABI.

5.2. Ensuring a healthy and safe work environment by adhering to good occupational safety practices.

5.3. Other Professional Standards: If one of the staff of the Institute is bound by other codes or standards than this, he / she must adhere to this Code of Conduct, and in the event of a conflict between standards, consult with the competent person (Ethics committee/commission).

ADMINISTRATIVE STUFF

1. Employees of the administrative staff should perform their duties by guiding their behavior on the principles of honesty, consistency and responsibility.
2.In the relationship with his colleagues, the employee is respectful and correct by observing the principle of confidentiality, avoiding behaviour that damages the rights and autonomy of the person.
3.In the relationship with his colleagues, the employee is respectful and correct by observing the principle of confidentiality, avoiding behaviour that damages the rights and autonomy of the person.
4. In carrying out its activities, the employee regards kindly and with respect for everyone, and does not tolerate discrimination on grounds of sex, age, sexual orientation, racial, religious, ethnic or political reasons, etc.
5. The employee is loyal to his employer and follows a behavior that does not harm the prestige and reputation of ABI.
6. The employee strives to avoid the collision between his duties and his personal interests. Avoid and report in due time about any form of bribery.
7. Employees strive to prevent conflicting situations with each other and with outsiders.
8.When resolving conflicting situations, the employee should seek the assistance of the immediate or senior supervisor and, in more complex cases, the expert opinion of the ethics committee.
9. Every employee strives quickly and seamlessly to meet the needs of the research staff, PhD students and ABI visitors who are in the competence of his / her activity.

ETHICS IN REGULATORY ACTION

Scientific activities through the phases of knowledge production process

I. ETHICS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

1. The purpose of scientific research is the production of novel objective knowledge.

2. The principle of originality is the supreme value in the realm of science.

3. The researcher in plinciple is free to choose a research problem; is free to choose methodology and approaches to achieve the best results.

4. At the stage of the research process, the scientist must be guided by the data and facts on which the evidence is based; she does not follow blindly and does not trust too much the authority in her scientific field.

5. The scientist is required to minimize the possibilities for errors and bias in collecting, recording, analyzing and interpreting data.

6. The scientist must not allow actions such as fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of data and results. The scientist must be objective, impartial and honest in every aspect of the research process.

7. The scientist should avoid errors in the study. The cases of experimental, methodological and human error, self-deception, bias, and conflict of interest should be minimized.

8. It is desirable for the researcher to share data, results, methods and ideas, techniques and tools. She is obliged to allow his colleagues to the results of research and to be open to criticism and new / different ideas, in case of public funded research.

9. It is desirable for the researcher to accurately document and store the results in the course of her research. She is required to prepare them so that they are accessible to colleagues and the public when it comes to publicly funded research or the contract applicant when it comes to privately funded research or services.

10. The scientist must work for the progress of science as a public good free from political or other side effects.

11. The researcher should be precise to his employer and organization, who are guarantors or users of his project and expert judgment. At the same time, it must present the scientific data in an objective manner, without taking into account their expectations of results and conclusions. It shall not enter into contracts for the funding of scientific research and appearances that violate the principles laid down in this Code or may be harmful to human health.

12. When participating in collaborative projects, scientists must reach a common understanding on assignment of tasks, access to databases, copyrights and other rights and responsibilities.

13. As researchers in the field of plant biotechnology, ABI researchers have public responsibility. Their recommendations, decisions and statements can influence the lives of others in society. Research must respect human rights and dignity.

14. When deciding to participate in a project in which ABI is not a basic organization, the ABI Researcher is obliged to inform the Head of his department, who in turn is obliged to inform the management of the Institute for loyalty and avoidance conflicts of interest.

15. When designing new project proposals, ABI scientists are required to avoid conflicts of interest between the research departments of the Institute as a result of overlapping topics and project proposal objectives.

16. In conducting their research, ABI scientists are required to demonstrate the welfare of animals used in experimental work.

17. In conducting their research, ABI scientists should protect the environment from pollution and care for the conservation of natural populations of plants and animals.

18. In the course of the study the scientist is obliged to observe the laws relating to his activity.

I. THE ETHICS OF SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

A) Scientific discussion

1. The purpose of scientific communication is to legitimate the presented novel, objective, original knowledge.
2. 2. The scientist is required to submit the research results achieved to his colleagues at the ABI and the community of scientists in publicly funded research.
3. ABI staff should participate in scientific discussions, guided by the principle of equal treatment - criticism, discussion and controversy are independent of the scientific degrees, titles and positions of the participant in the discussion.
4. Scientists are required to show professional skepticism when examining any original knowledge without growing up into personal attacks on colleagues who present their research results.
5. In the discussion, researchers should try to represent adequately and understandably their

arguments by using different techniques for this purpose: pre-dissemination of the whole text or theses, clear definition of the contentious concepts, modern presentatory techniques, etc.
6. Subject of discussion should be only the ideas, themes, theories, models, hypotheses, projects, prognoses, programs, perceptions and should be avoid any personal relations, attacks and insults, declaration of bias.

B) Presentation and publication activity

1. The scientist is obliged to submit the research results, financed by public funds, in the form of publications or presentations of scientific forums, lectures, dissertations, etc.
2. When publishing or presenting a research result, the scientist shall act as an author and as such shall be obliged to formulate the concept, make it understandable, well reasoned, provide a response to any counter-arguments.
3. The author is obliged to structure the content of the publication /presentation in order to facilitate its comprehension, to make clear the connection between the newly acquired knowledge (original contribution) and the "old" already known to the colleagues.
It is required to demonstrate the relevance of the experimental data to the concept, to observe the consistency of the expose, according to the disciplinary requirements.
4. The scholar is obliged to observe ethical and legal norms when working with literary sources and in conducting the research, as well as in publication and presentation of the results. Violation of these rules involves three forms of deviation from ethical practice:
7.1. Falsification - replacement or inaccurate presentation of scientific data or results;
7.2. Fabrication - inventing and offering non-existent data or research results;
7.3. Plagiarism - misappropriation of texts or ideas to another person, not to mention his authorship.
8. In the case of publications by several authors, the arrangement is made by first mentioning the name of the author with the greatest contribution to the study. Only direct participation can identify authorship on a scientific achievement or publication.
9. In his publications, the scholars should describe all sources of funding.

C) Assessment in Science and Peer Review

1. Science evaluation is a spontaneous process driven by new knowledge, research results, discovery.

2. The scholar at this stage of the scientific process takes the role of evaluator. Conditions for scientific evaluation are: understanding the research result (produced new knowledge), verifying originality (avoiding unintentional or deliberate plagiarism), scrutiny the research procedures (relevance of the facts to the concept, obtaining the experimental data and its processing, logical consistency of concept, theory, justifiability, evidence).

3. When conducting an expert assessment, the scholar should avoid bias. He or she must voluntarily refuse to provide expert judgment or be removed from participation in the event of a finding of self-interest or interest of third parties.

4. As a reviewer, the scholar is responsible for giving an impartial opinion on scientific publications or dissertations. It should accept for review only works of its own competence.

5. Reviewing a scientific publication should be confidential.

6. The scholras are required in the reviews of dissertations, books, articles and projects to ensure that the content of the exposure and its conclusion match exactly. No discrepancy in these two elements should be allowed. The review should be homogeneous and consistent in its parts.

7. When reviewing dissertations, the scholar should follow the deadlines set for submitting the reviews, avoiding any unjustified delay.

8. In making the expertise, the scientist should only be involved in drawing up the expertise if it is in the field of his specialization.

III. SUPERVISION AND MENTORING

1. Supervision / mentoring usually involves interpersonal professional relationships between senior and young researchers.

2. The scientist is obliged to formally or informally train the PhD students in research work.

3. The scholar, in the role of a scientific supervisor, is required to conduct training that includes: formal instruction and mentoring.

4. The senior researcher is required to take responsibility for the role of a scientific supervisor with the clear awareness that her behavior may have a negative impact on the young researcher.

5. The principles of confidentiality, objectivity and equality must be respected in the relations between the scientific supervisor and the doctoral student. Avoid personal relationships outside the service.

6. The scientific supervisor shall refrain from any form of exploitation of the doctoral student entrusted for training. The exploitation of young scientists by senior researchers violates the principle of mutual respect in science and destroys the trust in which the relationship between the scientific supervisor and the doctoral student is built.

7. The scientific supervisor is required to spend time, energy and resources on the training of the PhD student. The scientific supervisor is obliged to provide quality mentoring in the process of training and completing the dissertation work of his / her assigned doctoral student.

8. The senior researcher is required to acknowledge the contribution of the young PhD student, if any, to their joint research.

9. Each PhD student has right to obtain support from colleagues at the ABI in the course of his / her research.

10. Each PhD student has the right to freely determine the methods and guidelines of his / her research in the framework of ABI's scientific policy, taking into account possible limitations arising from the specifics of the scientific guidance or from material, financial reasons.

11. Each PhD student has the right to equal participation and equal access to information and resources in the research projects in which he / she takes part, according to the role he / she has in the project.

12. Each PhD student should strive for a full career development, to monitor and use different opportunities to improve his / her training and qualification.

13. Doctoral students should seek to select current scientific issues and relevant problem areas, the purpose of which is to contribute to the development of science as a whole.

14. PhD students monitor and observe the predetermined timeframes for working on the dissertation

15. In the course of their work PhD students should observe the principle of accountability to the scientific leader and the scientific unit for the successful course and conclusion of their dissertation.

16. PhD students should correctly present the literature used in their dissertation work.

17. PhD students are required to formulate correctly the contributions of their work (together with their supervisors).

18. Doctoral students should submit publications in pre-reviewed journals, not scientifically popular journals and periodicals, or electronic publications in forums, blogs, etc.

19. When taking part in scientific seminars, debates and discussions, PhD students should be guided by the ethical rules for the scientific discussion set out in this Code.

ALEGATION OF SCEINTIFIC MISCONDUCT

1. Claims of unethical behavior must be submitted to the Chairman of the Ethics Committee. This letter should include a description of the alleged misconduct, information in support of the claim and citation of the Rules deemed to have been infringed.

2. The accused in unethical behavior shall be considered innocent until proven otherwise.

3. The Chairman of the Ethics Committee together with the Committie members shall assess whether the alleged act constitutes a violation of the ethical rules set out in the ABI Code of Ethics.

4. If the Ethics Committee finds that no breach has been committed within the meaning of this Code, it should promptly inform in writing the affected parties and the ABI leadership. In this situation, the case is deemed to have been completed.

5. If the Ethics Committee finds a violation during the hearings, an investigation shall be initiated. At this stage, the Chairman of the Ethics Commission is obliged to inform both parties that he has begun to consider a signal of unethical behavior.

5. Members of the Ethics Committee shall be required to hear both parties by examining the evidence and materials they provide and the additional items at their disposal. Upon completion of the investigation, the Commission shall prepare a report to the ABI Director stating: (a) the signal submitted and the results of the investigation; (b) an opinion statment; (c) recommendations for action by the management of ABI, including:

- Formal warning.

- Reasoned proposal to impose administrative sanctions.

3. The Commission shall request a written response from the ABI management on the implementation of the sanctions recommended.

ETHICAL COMMITTEE

1. This Code of Ethics constitutes the existence, structure and functions of the Ethics Committee.

2. The Ethics Committee consists of five members - four of the ABI and one external ethics expert.

3. The mandate of the Ethics Committee is 3 years.

4. In its formation, the Ethics Committee should draw up its Rules of Procedure regulating its internal organizational rules.

FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

1. The purpose of the Ethics Committee is to monitor the observance of the rules and principles in the activities of scientists, PhD students and administrative staff set out in this Code.

2. The Ethics Committee may advise and give opinions on general ethical issues affecting the activities of ABI.

3. Accepts and reviews written complaints and alerts of interested parties, requiring additional evidence if necessary.

4. Performs the role of mediator in settling conflicts between affected parties.

5. Hearing the parties in the case of allegation of misconducts.

6. When a member of the Commission is a party to the dispute, his/she shall be removed from participation in the proceedings until the case has been resolved in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

7. Take decisions by a qualified majority.

8. Recommend measures to ABI management.

9. Report at least once a year about its activities and the occurrences of the cases to ABI.

10. At the end of the mandate recommend changes to improve its activities.

The Code of Ethics of ABI was approved by the General Assembly of ABI on 30. 11.2018.