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“Development on the margin”

Ethics in Agricultural Sciences: Development and Implementation in the University’s Curricula

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Abstract

Transforming the global food systems in a sustainable manner requires new direction in agricultural research and practice. Researchers bear great responsibility. They collect and publish sensitive data dealing with the human and environmental subjects. Especially in the interdisciplinary field of agricultural sciences, a social, economic and environmental friendly food production depicts the base of our well-being. Agricultural scientists must be aware about norms and values interlinked with their research practice and therefore require systematic and critical methods to incorporate ethical approaches. By introducing ethics at the university students are expected to improve their ethical expertise balancing contradictory evidence and analysing controversial science.

With regard to the growing scope of duties as a researcher, students of Hohenheim initiated and successfully completed the first round of the module “Ethics of Food and Nutrition Security” which was held for the first time in the winter term 2010/11. An interdisciplinary teaching concept was created in a participatory approach with experts from both inside and outside the university. The designed master level course combines ethical theoretical background with interactive lectures on issues of food and nutrition security.

Based on the course evaluations, adaptations and improvements are being incorporated to facilitate the course’s aim to analyse and articulate ethical dimensions of agriculture. New instruments have been developed to measure empirically the effectiveness of teaching ethics and ethical competence through a pilot study developed within the module.

Positive feedback from the course participants shows the importance of implementing the module in the curricula of the university. This strengthens the call to mainstream ethical training into agricultural education worldwide.

Keywords: Applied ethics, ethical teaching, master module, social responsibility, student initiative, sustainable agriculture