Ethics in Agricultural (Ag) Data WG

WG Charter

The problem addressed Agricultural data span from field and farm data to scientific and research data to agricultural market data etc. These data are key in fundamental public-good level contexts: food production; transparency of agri-food value chains (traceability, certification, food safety); compliance evidence (for credit, insurance, subsidies, certification); risk management (early warnings), market and trade; and measuring impact. While having these data are essential, the fact that some of these data are of a sensitive nature, and the fact that power imbalances in agri-food value chains affect the way these data flows and who benefits the most, have strong ethical consequences.

The WG will address the ethical issues related to the treatment of agricultural data, focusing especially on the challenges and risks for the most marginalized actors in the data value chains: smallholder farmers and indigenous people. These groups are expected or asked to contribute data and be transparent, but have no voice in how data are used and are not the beneficiaries of the data revolution and digital transformation in general to which they contribute.

Addressing these issues requires moving from the abstract philosophical level to the practical level: producing/assembling sets of actionable guidelines for different actors on how to treat agricultural data ethically, respecting the rights of all parties involved and in particular those of the weaker actors, so that the benefits are equally shared.

Mission The Ethics in Ag Data WG strives to establish actionable guidelines for the ethical collection, use, processing, and sharing of agricultural data.

Vision To convene experts from diverse fields, interest groups and regions to co-develop, exchange, and endorse adaptable ethical guidelines for agricultural data across diverse contexts.

Objectives To co-create a framework of guidelines and recommendations for the ethical treatment of agricultural data that can be widely adopted/endorsed by farmers, diverse researchers, practitioners, institutions and other relevant actors.

Value Proposition

The beneficiaries of clear guidelines for the ethical treatment of agricultural data include institutions seeking ethical guidance; researchers endorsing or implementing the standards; and farmers, as data subjects, data co-creators, and end users.

Engagement with Existing Work in the Area

The WG will aim to build upon existing scholarship and frameworks that operate in the field of data ethics. It will primarily undertake this through a review of such extant work, including from existing RDA groups: the Ethics and Social Aspects of Data IG, Sensitive Data IG, and AI and Data Visitation WG, complemented with necessary discussions, focus groups, and other useful engagement to avoid duplication of work and outputs.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The work of the Ethics in Ag Data WG will further several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals including:

> **2. Zero Hunger –** Adhering to ethical standards in data collection, processing, and usage enables stakeholders to identify and effectively address food security challenges, optimize resource allocation, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. This promotes efficient food production, minimizes waste, enhances access to nutritious food, and drives progress towards achieving Zero Hunger.
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> **9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure –** A fairer treatment of data will result in more trust from data owners, particularly farmers, who will therefore contribute more to data flows along the value chains, to the benefit of industry and infrastructure. More equitable data flows also lead to more participatory innovation.
>
> **10. Reduced inequalities –** Enhanced data accessibility will support resource-poor researchers and institutions, while improved ethical data collection will directly benefit farmers.
>
> **16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions –** Decreasing the exploitation of data producers will increase justice and set ethical standards will build stronger institutions

Work Plan

Group will meet virtually once a month with more frequent meetings as necessary, especially leading up to deadlines. The group will draft initial recommendations then share these initial recommendations within their organizations and with other interested parties to solicit feedback. Based on this feedback, the group will finalize a set of recommendations to be published on the RDA website.

Standards will be set for meetings that ensure group members feel safe, conflicts will be resolved by WG chairs. Attempts will be made to ensure group members are at consensus with all aspects of products produced by the group. If there is no consensus after discussion, then a vote with a simple majority winning will be used. A quorum, being the majority of group members, must participate in a vote for the results to be valid.

The group will utilize a shared Google Drive to store all documents, meeting notes, slides, recordings, and other materials. Access will be granted to group members. Progress will be reported out at RDA events and meetings.

Adoption Plan

Members will strive to have their own organizations adopt standards established by the group. The standards will be presented at conferences including at RDA plenary meetings.

Initial Membership

Kathryn Bailey

Maria Christoforaki

Jane Ezirigwe

Ameen Jauhar

Alan Moss–Co-Chair

Valeria Pesce–Co-Chair

Caroline Wanjiru

Piotr Zaborowski