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# I have the privilege to work what is my true calling! (Part 2)

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*The leading scientist in the field of herbology, Prof. Dr. Tonio Tonev, a lecturer at the Agricultural University of Plovdiv, turned 60. From the position of this wise life springboard, he stated: "I thank fate for assigning me such an exciting place for professional realization. For me, the greatest challenge is never to give up, as well as not to forget that I have the privilege of working in what is my true calling and that I love very much!" A two-part interview.*

***Part 2*** *- the scientific project Herbitura, a base for biological testing of plant protection products, the vision of today's student at the Agricultural University, the future of Bulgarian agriculture, what a successful career is.*

**Since 2002, you have been leading your super successful scientific-applied project "HERBITURA". The results of the practical trials enjoy great authority, they are a fast track for innovations, influence market**

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**attitudes and expectations. Please - briefly about the characteristics of "Herbitura" and its new ideas.**

"Herbitura" is a scientific and implementation format that indisputably proves the validity and relevance of the slogan of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv: **"EDUCATION-SCIENCE-BUSINESS".** Next year "Herbitura" turns 15 and I dare say that the professional interest in it from plant protection product manufacturers, traders and farmers is great and constant. The project is a unique showcase of world achievements in the field of herbicide innovations and weed control technologies. Here, competing products preparing for a market premiere or already having positions in practice meet "live". "Herbitura" is an impartial mediator for defining an informed choice, for demonstrating competitive advantages and for structuring commercial concepts.

**Are there opportunities for speculation and creating false impressions about one or another product?**

My golden rule is to always keep my distance. Impartiality and loyalty are well-formulated and mandatory policies, a way of behavior on the territory of "Herbitura". And the slightest deviation would lead to undesirable consequences, to a total collapse of the long-built authority and ultimately to a fatal end of the project.

I am pleased to share that in 2015, a **Base for Biological Testing of Plant Protection Products** began functioning within the system of the Agricultural University. The interest in this new project from manufacturing companies is very high and exceeded our preliminary forecasts.

**What is the reason for this interest, is there enough competitive presence on the market?**

My professional career for nearly 35 years has been related to testing new herbicide products. It is logical that when this professional competence is combined with an excellent team of young followers, with excellent conditions for experimental work, the final result is very good.

The merit of this activity of ours is that all innovations in plant protection become available to students, including in the master's courses in plant protection in the disciplines of monitoring and integrated plant protection. This fact gives me reason to reaffirm the circumstance that I am not a desk professor, almost all of my teaching and scientific activity is addressed to the field and in a real environment.

**In the preliminary conversation, you mentioned that you are not alone in the management of "Herbitura" and the Base for Biological Testing of PPPs...**

Throughout my career as a researcher, I have had the privilege that my wife and colleague Radka Toneva has always been by my side. With her personal presence and participation as a technical executor, she has been a guarantee for the precision of the performed practices. Another, no less privilege is the fact that I am surrounded by young and dedicated assistants and followers, such as chief assistant Anio Mitkov and doctoral student Marian Yanev. I look at them as a promising core of like-minded people and followers in our future research and implementation activities. The

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Base for Biological Testing is another chance for expression in the professional careers of these young colleagues in the field of herbology. My forecast and desire is for this team to be expanded with more new, truly committed and dedicated young people to the profession.

**You are the Head of the Department of "Agriculture and Herbology" in the Faculty of Agronomy at the Agricultural University. What is the vision of today's student? Does the educational system instill in him the confidence that tomorrow he will be a key figure in agriculture?**

The student audience is infinitely diverse. For me, it is a pleasure and an honor to work with those young people who have a visible interest in agronomy, in plant protection. Both in the bachelor's and master's courses, there are students with strong inclinations towards the profession, with a responsible attitude towards their education. Outside of their academic obligations, I allow myself to motivate them. I convince them on every occasion that Bulgarian agriculture needs highly professional, competent, ambitious and responsible specialists. I am sure that those students who do not waste their time will leave the Agricultural University in Plovdiv with solid knowledge that will give them opportunities for excellent professional realization.

**Do you believe in the future of Bulgarian agriculture as part of the European agricultural space?**

Bulgaria is doomed, in the good sense of the word, to be a strong agricultural country. Unfortunately, the land reform started after 1989 had the potential to make many more people rich, but the reasonable limits for achieving this pragmatic and necessary goal were not observed.

Let's return to the main question. Bulgaria has a natural resource – fertile land and a suitable climate, it has scientific, expert and production capital to take its due leading place in agricultural Europe. However, an adequate state policy and political will are needed to create a livelihood for more people, for more people to live decently, according to European standards.

**Do you have the feeling that you have reached the peak of your career? Do you agree with the statement that the thrill of the discoverer knows no final chords and age barriers?**

One of the peculiarities of agriculture is that with each farming year everything starts from the beginning. I haven't even dreamed of such an interesting professional career. The combination of workaholism and opportunities for such rewarding work is a stroke of fate. I believe in consistency and persistence in pursuing your goals and not giving up even when the hardest and most discouraging moments come. I thank fate for giving me such great luck – to work outside the comfort zone and to excite people. And to remain adequate, not to let go and to look at every life and professional difficulty as another opportunity and challenge to prove myself as a creative person.