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The General Assembly in 1985 established the Maryland Biotechnology Institute (MBI) at the University of Maryland. The Institute unites diverse research disciplines across the broad spectrum of biotechnology within the University of Maryland System. Administered by the University of Maryland System Administration, the Institute provides a core of expertise and state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to research, training, and economic development in biotechnology.

Biotechnology is any technique that uses living organisms or substances from those organisms to make or modify a product; perform services; improve plants or animals; or develop microorganisms for specific uses.

These techniques include the use of novel technologies, such as recombinant deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), cell fusion, and other new bioprocesses.

The Institute consists of five centers: Center for Advanced Research in Biotechnology; Center for Agricultural Biotechnology; Center of Marine Biotechnology; Center for Public Issues in Biotechnology; and Medical Biotechnology Center.

In research and academic activities, each center works closely with government laboratories, other academic research institutions, and the State's growing biotechnology business community. The Maryland Sea Grant College, though not an official Institute center, is administered by the Institute and collaborates with the Center of Marine Biotechnology.

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The Center for Advanced Research in Biotechnology was established in 1985 to build and cultivate a multidisciplinary center of research excellence in protein engineering, structure, and function. Through collaboration with industrial scientists and cultivation of a basic research environment beneficial to industry, the Center fosters advancement of Maryland's biotechnology industry.

The Center's scientific programs are managed by the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute and the National Institute of Standards and Technology with advice from a board of overseers representing the University of Maryland System, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Montgomery County government, and the local biotechnology community.

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Created in 1987, the Center for Agricultural Biotechnology studies the molecular biology of plant and animal protection, particularly of plant-pathogen interactions, poultry virus and vaccine production, and insect genetic engineering. Research programs integrate molecular genetics and biochemical engineering methods to study gene expression. The Center cooperates with scientists at the National Agricultural Research Center, including the Molecular Plant Pathology Laboratory, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.