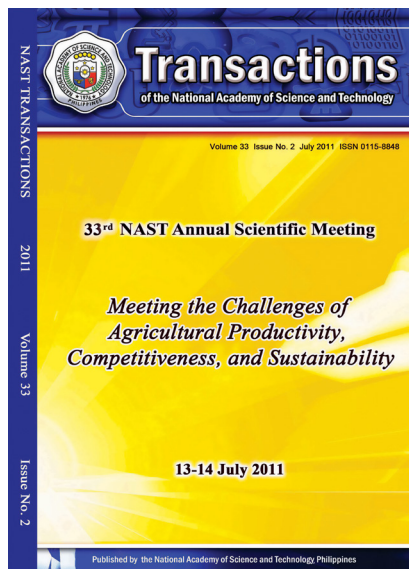


Transactions NAST PHL, is the official journal of the National Academy of Science and Technology Philippines. It has traditionally published papers presented during the Academy's Annual Scientific Meeting since 1979 to promote science-based policy discussions of and recommendations on timely and relevant national issues as part of its functions as a national science academy. Starting in 2021, this journal has been open to contributions from the global scientific community in all fields of science and technology.



Meeting the Challenges of Agricultural Productivity, Sustainability, and Competitiveness

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Citation

Pangilinan FN. 2011. Meeting the challenges of agricultural productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness. Transactions NAST PHL 33(2): 229-231. doi.org/10.57043/transnastphl.2011.3774

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**Keynote Address for the 33rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the
National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines (NAST PHL)**

**MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF AGRICULTURAL
PRODUCTIVITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND
COMPETITIVENESS**

Senator Francis N. Pangilinan

Good morning.

We wish to thank Dr. Javier for inviting us to today's event, as the scientific community comes together to discuss how science and technology could be used to address some of our key social, environmental, and economic issues and help lift the country out of poverty. We have seen from recent events the urgency of meeting our agricultural challenges: massive amounts of fish kill in Batangas and Pangasinan have left our fishermen out of livelihood and are threatening our food supply; extreme weather caused by climate change is causing us billions of pesos worth of damage—not to mention hundreds of lives—yearly; the series of crises in the Middle East is sending millions of our people home with no viable alternatives for livelihood and security; and our ballooning population, coupled with unsustainable use of resources, is threatening our already substandard quality of life. While we look to high-technology and 21st century models to inspire us in our work, we also know that we need to go back to basics and resolve our challenges in agriculture if we are to move our nation forward.

The agriculture sector accounts for roughly 70% of our labor force, including those indirectly involved in agriculture, and it also accounts for around 70% of our GDP. However, if you look at the total budget allocated for agriculture, as well as science and technology, you will see that not enough resources are directed toward this crucial sector. We see more money being pumped into —intelligence funds rather than urgent investments in agricultural infrastructure and R&D. Add to that, our farmers are getting older and poorer, and there are no attractive options or incentives for the next generation to step up in this field. We will be facing a looming crisis, as well as a breakdown in our domestic economy, if things don't shape up soon. As Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, it is our priority to address key issues in the following areas:

- **Access to credit for farmers, fishermen, agricultural workers, and budding “farmpreneurs”;**
- **Access to markets, both domestic and overseas;**
- **Roll-out of critical infrastructure—such as farm-to-market roads, post-harvest facilities, cold storage facilities, and the like;**
- **Increased investments in Research & Development, as well as the transfer of knowledge and technology from our researchers and scientists onto the field; and;**
- **Helping agricultural workers get organized to be able to benefit from the cooperative and micro-finance models, which we have seen works in many parts of the country.**

Of these five priorities, we are counting on the scientific community to help us address our clear gaps in R&D—especially in translating scientific knowledge into practical, applicable information that will help boost the agricultural sector’s profitability, productivity, and sustainability. We know that we have some of the best minds in this room today, and if we could all work together to bring the latest of your research and scientific breakthroughs out to the field to be tested or rolled out, then we could make great headway in finding solutions that work. Remember: we were the country that once taught Japan, Vietnam, and other countries in the region a lot of what they know about agriculture. If we could harness all that energy, knowledge, and potential today, then we can make a big difference for our people, for our children.

I have always said that for us to achieve different results, we need to do things differently. Einstein himself said that — “*We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them*”. We cannot have more of the same poverty, more of the same hunger, more of the same vulnerability, more of the same injustice. We therefore need to look at the challenges of agriculture from new lenses, with new mindsets and perspectives, with a new vision in mind. We must be willing to dare. We must be willing to tackle risks. To do things differently.

On a personal note, when I was faced with the decision of whether or not to take the Agriculture and Food Committee some months ago, I initially hesitated knowing that I know very little about the Agriculture and Fisheries sector in that it most definitely wasn’t my forte. Yet, my nearly ten years in

the Senate has taught me that poverty and backwardness will not go away unless we modernize our Agriculture and Fisheries sector—that in order to reach developed-nation status in a decade and a half, we must resolve the decades-old problems facing Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization. Hence, I told myself, I had to walk the talk. I had to move away from my comfort zone if I was to make a real difference. I had to risk. I had to dare. I had to have the courage to do things differently and see change through. It was Gandhi who said — “*We must be the change we seek to see*”. And so my own personal journey to help secure our farmers and fisherfolk began.

So let us map out a new future for our country starting today—right here in this very hall. Let us open our minds, reach out and collaborate, and create solutions that will make life better for all of us. Your government is here to listen, to participate, and to act, and we hope that, with you, we can change the lives of millions of our countrymen and forever change our nation’s path toward one of genuine change, progress, and prosperity.

Thank you and good morning.