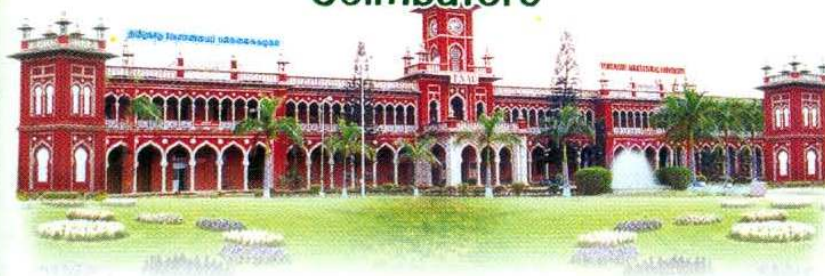




36th Convocation

Monday, 17th August 2015

**Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
Coimbatore**



Acceptance Speech

Dr. Susan R. McCouch

Professor, Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics,
Cornell University, USA

Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General & Former Director,
World Food Program, New York, USA.

Thiru. Ashok Bakthavathsalam

Chairman & Managing Director,
K.G. Information Systems Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore

**Acceptance Speech of Dr. Susan R. McCouch
on Conferment of Degree of Doctor of Science
(*Honoris Causa*)**

**at the 36th Convocation of
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University**

August 17, 2015

His Excellency, Honourable Governor of Tamil Nadu and Chancellor of TNAU, Honourable Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Agriculture, Government of Tamil Nadu and Pro Chancellor of TNAU, Vice Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Dr. K. Ramasamy, Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, New York, and Mr. Ashok Bakthavathsalam, Founder and Director of KG Groups of Institutes Distinguished Academicians and Officers, Members of Board of Management, Members of Academic, Research and Extension Education Councils, University Officers, Teaching and Non-teaching Communities of TNAU, Graduates of the year, Parents, Students and Members from the Press and Media, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am extremely humbled and honoured to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Science from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University during this 36th convocation here in Coimbatore today. I deeply thank TNAU for bestowing

this honour upon me. Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is among the world's top agricultural universities - a forward thinking institution whose faculty and students are leaders in the development, dissemination and adoption of new technologies. TNAU educates its students to be innovators, hard workers and empathetic achievers in many fields of science and agriculture.

I have always felt privileged to work with TNAU and feel even more privileged to be recognized with this honorary degree.

Through the efforts of its faculty and students over more than 100 years, TNAU has transformed the lives of millions of farmers in the state of Tamil Nadu and across India. I admire the institution for its efforts and its achievements.

To receive this degree is both an honour and a responsibility. I look forward to fulfilling your trust in me. It is in the fields of rice research, molecular marker technology, and genomics that I know TNAU the best and feel I have the most to contribute. I am also sincerely interested in contributing to the education of the next generation of plant breeders, both men and women.

TNAU focuses on many agricultural crops, and one of the most important is rice. Rice is India's preeminent crop, the staple of most Indians and most Asians. India has the world's largest area under rice cultivation and is one of the

largest producers of white rice, accounting for 20% of global rice production. Today, India is the world's second largest exporter of rice. And there are still improvements to be made.

TNAU has invested significant resources and efforts toward rice improvement and can proudly take its place among the world's premiere institutes for rice research. For this and other reasons, it is dear to my heart.

I started my career working at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, and one of my very first PhD students was a TNAU graduate. I first visited this great university in 1990 and had an opportunity to know the activities of Paddy Breeding Station on 21.11.1990 and have always revered it. For the last 20 years, I have had the privilege of leading a rice research program as a professor of Plant Breeding and Genetics in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell. Because I live and work in a part of the world where no rice is grown commercially, I have established many international research collaborations that give meaning to my work, and also give students and young professionals the opportunity to participate in the global world of science that is so important to the future of rice as one of the world's essential food-security crops.

Several collaborative programs between Cornell and TNAU support research, curriculum innovations, faculty development, and student exchange initiatives.

One of the most prominent TNAU-CORNELL educational partnerships has been **Experiential Learning for Globalizing Agriculture**, in which some of you have participated. This course on international agriculture prepares graduates for leadership positions in global agriculture. This experiential learning program acquaints students with food security issues, using South Asia as a case study, and demonstrates how problems in these areas are being addressed by international, government, private sector and non-government agencies.

There has also been a Dual Degree Program between Cornell and TNAU. Thanks to the Tata Trust and the Cornell Sathguru Foundation, an innovative and unique collaborative academic program was developed for graduate students in Food Science and Plant Breeding. This dual degree program was the first of its kind and paved the way for future international partnership programs in agriculture. Over **40** students completed dual degrees from Cornell and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, and many have secured excellent research positions in US and Indian universities and high profile jobs in the private sector.

Faculty Capacity Building has been another collaborative endeavor. Cornell University has provided training opportunities on its campus for TNAU faculty, while TNAU has provided teaching opportunities on its campus for Cornell faculty. The dual degree program facilitated the

development of joint research themes and encouraged faculty and department coordination.

The Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project II, or ABSPII, is one of the flagship projects of USAID. It focused on biotechnology interventions for enhancing food production. TNAU was a major partner in the ABSPII consortium, led by Cornell University. It supported the development of pest and disease-resistant brinjal (eggplant) of interest to small-scale farmers and worked to build local scientific, management and policy-making capabilities at every step of the product development and regulatory approval processes. TNAU and Cornell have facilitated several public-private partnerships that provide support for national research organizations in the areas of product development, intellectual property rights, technology transfer, bio-safety policy, bio-safety testing, and science communication.

I offer my most profound thanks to His Excellency, The Governor of Tamil Nadu and the Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University; the Honourable Minister for Housing Urban Development and Agriculture, the Government of Tamil Nadu and Pro-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University; the Vice-Chancellor and Members of the Board of Management; and the Academic Council for conferring this honor on me. It is a day that I will always remember.

Finally, I extend my heartiest congratulations to all the students assembled here for your well-deserved degrees and awards! As we embark on our life's work, I extend my very best wishes for a bright and prosperous future and may we all be encouraged to work together to reach our potential.

Thank you very much.



Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
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Printed at : TNAU Offset Press, Cbe-3.