

**Speech for Belize Livestock Producers' Association**  
**46<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**

**Hon. Jose Abelardo Mai, Minister of Agriculture**

**Chairman Mr. Arden Edwards, CEO Mr. William Usher and Board members of Belize Livestock Producers' Association**

It's a great honor to join everyone here today. Thank you very much for inviting me to speak on this significant event. I am of course no expert on agriculture or livestock; however, agriculture is a key area of technical cooperation between Taiwan and Belize, and we do have livestock collaborative program that worth sharing with members of this important association. So here I am.

First, to set the context for my talk, please allow me to share a short video about the development of Taiwan's livestock industry.

Thanks for your attention. Although this video is not very up-to-date, it shows the journey of Taiwan's livestock industry development in a nutshell. As the video showed, Taiwan was an agricultural society and based its economy mainly on agriculture decades ago. Nowadays, we have made great strides in economic development; nevertheless, agriculture remains an important industry in Taiwan.

Over the years, Taiwan's livestock industry has faced many challenges and tests. Take our pork industry for example:

1. Pork in Taiwan's dietary culture is like chicken in Belize. Not only does pork play an important role in our domestic market, Taiwan also used to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest pork export country in the world. But the industry was hit hard by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in late 90s, and further damaged by the cheap import pork following our entry into WTO in early 2000s. As a result, three quarters of the total 25,000 pig-raising farmers were wiped out.
2. However, crises provide opportunities for change. With collaboration between government, research institutes and farmers, this once heavily polluted traditional

industry has undergone numerous reforms and upgraded to keep up with the times. Farmers nowadays use modern technology to manage pig farms, prevent disease and improve safety controls in line with international standards. I am glad to report that Taiwan is very close to become the first country in Asia eradicating three major pig diseases (namely foot and mouth, African swine fever, and classical swine fever.)

3. Furthermore, in the face of growing challenges of climate change and to make sure the industry continues to grow sustainably, more and more farmers are adopting green farming practices and circular economy approach, such as producing biogas as energy and transforming pigs' waste into organic fertilizers, and hence add even higher value to the industry. Reflecting on this transformative journey, Taiwan's pork industry has indeed come a long way!

Taiwan never forgets it was once a developing country that relied on international assistance and we understand the importance of such support to a country's development. Therefore, as soon as reached the point where we could lend a helping hand to other countries in need, we started to do so. As early as 1959, Taiwan deployed its first agricultural mission to Vietnam.

During the past several decades, our technical missions have worked with many development partner countries across the globe. Nowadays, our technical cooperation covers a broad range of areas, but be it agriculture, public health, digital transformation, or other area, the main theme is always the expertise, know-how and experience we learned from our own development journey. I dare say, this is the most valuable resource that Taiwan can offer to our development partners. Allow me to share another example that's more relevant to our audience today.

**Ex. The sheep and goat project:** Belize is considered one of the countries with highest potential in development of small ruminant industry in Caribbean region. Small ruminants are able to convert low quality forages to high quality meat; their small size, using minimal land space and requiring low capital investment all make them ideal livestock for resource-poor farmers. Plus, small ruminant industry is considered more environmental-friendly.

1. Our two governments have worked together on the Sheep and Goat Project since 2016. Over the past 9 years, through our joint efforts, this project has borne fruits in many aspects: we now have an advanced national breeding facility in Central Farm, and a new modern sheep barn in Yo Creek; the project provides high quality pure

breeding sheep as well as technical support to farmers and technicians; it also strengthens traceability system, even creates new lamb recipes and develops byproducts to help expand the domestic market.

2. As a result, the sheep population in Belize has increased considerably, from around 11,000 to 17,000; per capita consumption of lamb has also increased from 0.29 pound to 1 pound; and sheep farmers' earning also rise 30%. These statistics are indeed encouraging, but for me, seeing many women participate in raising sheep and goat, in particular single moms, and improve their livelihood is most heartwarming.
3. We believe this Project has laid a strong foundation for the sheep and goat industry in Belize to grow continuously. I want to take this opportunity to encourage the Belize Livestock Producers' Association to welcome these sheep producers joining your esteem group. With the support of this wonderful network, we will surely see the sustainable development of the sheep and goat industry in the country.

Dear Friends, as a development partner of Belize, Taiwan is fully aware of the crucial role agriculture plays in the country. We are committed to working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and collaborate with other stakeholders to strengthen the nation's agricultural sector. The recent events like flooding caused by tropical storm Sara and the threat of New World Screwworm remind us of the constant challenges the agriculture sector in general, and livestock industry in particular, is facing. However, if I have to point out the most important lesson learned from Taiwan's development experience, it would be, crises and challenges only make us stronger; we always bounce back and build back better! The people of both our nations share the same characters of resilience and hard-working. Our people are also smart and innovative. With strong partnership and team work, together we will surely build an Economic, Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Future for Belize's livestock industry!