

# EPA Grant to College Urban Horticulture Program Aids Students in the Roosevelt School District

The Urban Horticulture and Agribusiness program at Mesa Community College (MCC), in partnership with the Roosevelt School District and RighTrac, Inc., received a two-year \$108,000 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Education grant to establish a Center for Urban Agriculture (CUA). The Center will serve as a hub for the development and dissemination of educational programs focused on sustainable agriculture and community enhancement.

One new course to arise from this program is Aquaponics AGS166. "Aquaponics is an advanced method of aquaculture where fish provide nutrients to grow plants which in turn filter water to sustain fish," said Peter Conden, director of MCC's Urban Horticulture Program. "This course is our petri dish. Whatever comes out of this we will propagate."

The Roosevelt School District will be the first to benefit from the outputs of the grant. Using its greenhouse classroom and gardens MCC, along with RighTrac, Inc., will develop an aquaponics-based STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) curriculum for K-8 students and train educators and volunteers to deliver the new curriculum.

"This cutting-edge technology, this potent form of STEM education, is an exciting way to bring math and science into our classrooms," said Lawrence Robinson, Roosevelt School District Governing Board member. More than 1,000 Roosevelt School District students will benefit from hands-on learning from on-site aquaponic systems made possible through sub-grants to four of the District's schools."

Project partner and aquacultural/STEM education specialists, RighTrac, Inc., will facilitate monthly community education workshops at Brooks Community School throughout the duration of the grant. "We're glad to have the opportunity to share our knowledge and experience of this fairly new concept with our community," stated James Hicks, CEO, RighTrac, Inc.

The grant also provides funds to develop a Sustainable Agriculture degree program at MCC. "We are grateful to the EPA for the infusion of funds to develop new curriculum and raise awareness of the importance of ecosystem stewardship, civic responsibility and early STEM education," said Bob Bonura, Chair of MCC's Applied Sciences & Technology Department.



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