FROM EXPERTISE TO IMPACT

Building a Regional Aquaponics Extension Program

Matthew "Rex" Recsetar
Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist | Biosystems Engineering

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
Cooperative Extension

The Opportunity

Why Aquaponics Extension?

Aquaponics combines aquaculture and hydroponics into an integrated food-production system with growing interest among producers, schools, communities, and beginning farmers.

- Agricultural professionals are increasingly asked for guidance on aquaponics.
- Many Extension, NRCS, and other agricultural professionals have limited aquaponics-specific training.
- Available information can be fragmented, highly technical, or poorly adapted to local production conditions.
- Producers need practical, science-based information from trusted agricultural professionals.



The Opportunity to Scale

Initial Idea: Develop aquaponics Extension publications, workshops, demonstrations, and other practical educational resources.

But one specialist can only reach so many people.

The project revolved around a larger question:

How can we equip agricultural professionals to become trusted local aquaponics resources?



This shifted the project from delivering aquaponics education directly to building regional capacity through a train-the-trainer approach.

From Expertise to Impact

Building the Extension Pipeline



The goal: move from isolated educational activities to a coordinated, scalable Extension program.

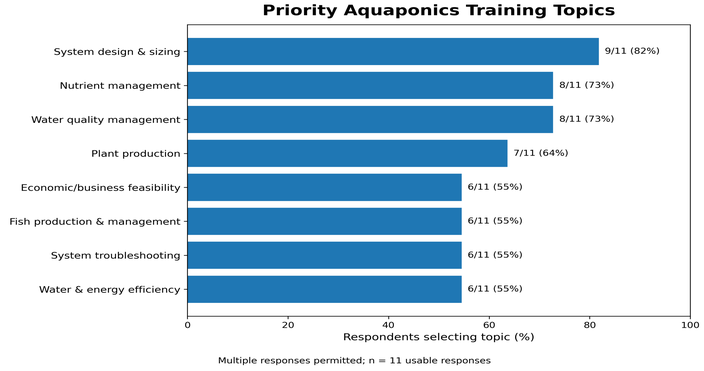
Listening Before Teaching: Aquaponics Needs Assessment

A needs-assessment survey was distributed to Extension, NRCS, and other agricultural professionals to better understand current aquaponics knowledge, stakeholder needs, and priorities for future training.

Respondent profile (n = 11): 8 Cooperative Extension • 2 Tribal agriculture/Extension • 1 educational institution

91% received aquaponics questions at least once in the past 2–3 years

64% reported none or limited aquaponics knowledge



Multiple responses permitted; n = 11 usable responses

PROGRESS, LESSONS & WHAT'S NEXT

Progress to Date

- Aquaponics Extension publication completed
- Aquaponics workshop delivered
- Needs-assessment survey launched
- Regional train-the-trainer framework developed
- External funding pursued to support broader implementation





The project evolved from creating individual resources to building a coordinated regional Extension program.

Lessons From the Project

Listen before developing. Let the audience help define educational priorities.

Build capacity, not just content. Training professionals multiplies Extension reach.

Think in programs, not events. Publications, workshops, mentoring, and partnerships work best as a connected system.

What's Next

- Analyze survey results
- Refine training content around priority needs
- Expand partnerships through aquaponics networks
- Deliver train-the-trainer workshops
- Provide mentoring and follow-up support
- Evaluate adoption and regional impact