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Mesa Community College receives agriculture grant from EPA

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Mesa Community College Urban Horticulture Program

Mesa Community College's Urban Horticulture Program involves individuals from around the community. (From Left) Preston Cameron-MCC, Peter Conden-MCC, George Brooks-RighTrac, Inc., Bob Bonura-MCC, Jim Hicks-RighTrac, Inc., Lawrence Robinson-Roosevelt School District.

Posted: Monday, September 29, 2014 6:45 am

By Trevor Godfrey, Tribune

Mesa Community College has received a grant from the EPA totaling just more than \$80,000, which it plans to use for stimulating interest and education in a variety of new agriculture techniques best suited to Mesa's increasingly urban environment.

“This environmental education effort will teach employable skills to students and enable them to become environmental stewards,” said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest, in a press release. “The hands-on experience that Mesa Community College students will receive is unparalleled and will serve as a model for similar institutions nationwide.”

Peter Conden, director of MCC's Urban Horticulture Program, said when he took over the program, there was a need to place

agricultural studies on the back burner due to a simple lack of general interest in the subject, but the new Innovative Center for Urban Agriculture will bring it back to the front in a big way.

“After reviewing the program ... it seemed like agriculture was really important, still, but it needed to reflect the community,” Conden said. “People really want to learn how to grow food, now more than ever.”

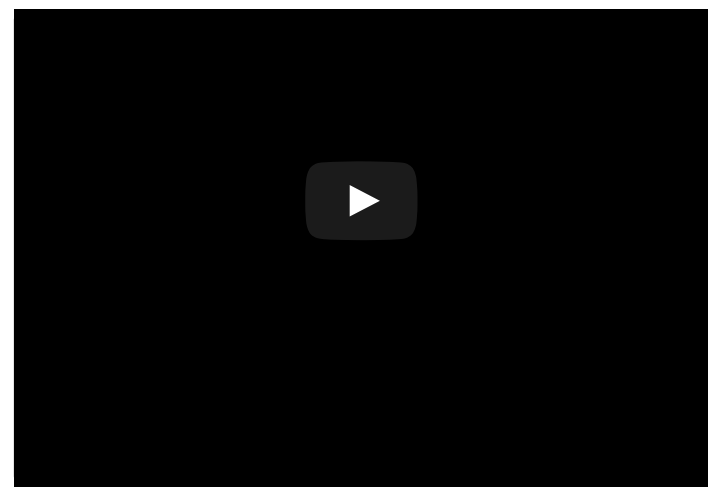
That means that educators need to teach urbanites to grow food anywhere from a community

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garden to their own backyards. Conden intends to focus on teaching aquaponics, a method of combining traditional agriculture and hydroponics to create a animal/plant system that creates its own nutrients for raising and growing both.

“The grant was for the environmental education,” Conden said. “We figure what’s a better way to teach people environmental education than through aquaponics?”

The program is divided into several stages, but it includes teaching seminars on gardening and sub-granting to aquaponics STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs in local school districts. The college has already partnered with the Roosevelt School District.

“We are truly excited to have this unique opportunity to partner with the U.S. EPA on developing a Center for Urban Agriculture Program at Mesa Community College,” said Shouan Pan, MCC’s president, in a press release. “This model program promises to promote environmental education and advance a growing industry.”

MCC is also looking for volunteers to help run the organic farm that will be established.

People interested should contact Conden at peter.conden@mesacc.edu.

Contact writer: (480) 898-6581 or tgodfrey@evtrib.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@trevoregodfrey](https://twitter.com/trevoregodfrey).

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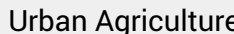




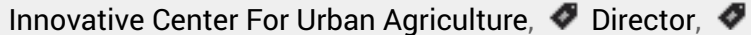





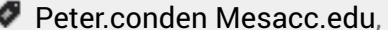

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