



By Dr. James Rakocy

If success can be measured in numbers, as it often is, then UVI held its most successful International Aquaponics and Aquaculture Course during June 13-19 on St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. A total of 92 participants took the course, but the number could have been much higher. I intended to limit enrollment to 74, a number that allowed spacious seating in our conference room and small groups for field exercises. As many more than 74 applications poured in, I closed enrollment early and tried talking people out of coming, but there were many applications already in the mail and other people called to plead their case for coming. My ability to dissuade them was poor. Several participants had purchased nonrefundable plane tickets. Others said they had acquired financing or land for an aquaponics project and absolutely needed to come. The reasons varied and enrollment kept increasing. Eventually I made a wait list and finally dug in my heels when the number reached 96, four of which did not show for various reasons. I believe we could have had upwards to 120 students.

Having so many students meant that we had to be very organized and efficient, but my team of Don Bailey, Charlie Shultz and Jason Danaher taught the course many times before and were up to the task. Despite the large number, everything went like clock work. In an attempt to save my voice and be heard, I bought a megaphone for the first day's group tour of our research facilities. We put colored dots on the name tags so everyone knew which of the four groups they belonged to for field exercises. We set up four field demonstration stations and with our iPhone timers we knew exactly when to rotate the groups. The only drawback was the cancellation of the snorkeling trip to Buck Island National Park and a beach barbecue on the last day. The threat of a tropical storm forced Captain Big Beard to harbor his two sailboats.

So why was the turnout so large? I think that interest in aquaponics is skyrocketing due to an increasing awareness through popular articles in newspapers and magazines, radio and TV inter-

views, Internet listings, YouTube videos, aquaponic projects at schools and word of mouth. People are generally fascinated by the concept and go out of their way to visit aquaponic systems in operation. And the word has spread far. As an example, I recently gave an Internet interview to a reporter for a major newspaper (El Mercurio) in Chile.

Reunion Island – France, Jamaica, Mexico, St. Maarten - Netherlands Antilles, Peru, Singapore, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Abu Dhabi – United Arab Emirates).

Numbers may count, but what is more important is impact, and we are receiving many e-mails indicating that course participants are already con-



*Class photo of students attending UVI's 12<sup>th</sup> International Aquaponics and Tilapia Aquaculture Course*

The students in this year's course reflect this breadth of interest. Students came from 24 states (Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia), three U.S. territories (Saipan, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands) and 17 countries (Antigua, Argentina, Bahamas, Botswana, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Colombia, England,

structuring or planning to construct aquaponic systems. Our ultimate goal is to see this newly-acquired aquaponic knowledge be applied to produce fresh fish and vegetables, generate employment, create wealth and preserve the environment.

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