

## **USDA Online Chat via Google Hangout, September 17, 2015 11am Eastern Comments From Marianne Cufone of the Recirculating Farms Coalition**

I'm not a vet myself, but I did work for the U.S. Army as a civilian years ago in Europe, and gained an interest in and great respect for those who serve our country through the military.

Today, I'm the Director of the Recirculating Farms Coalition – we are a non-profit organization headquartered in New Orleans, Louisiana. We work nationwide to support farms and farmers using soilless water-based growing methods as their primary means of production or along with traditional soil-based growing. So this means aquaculture, hydroponics, and aquaponics – where fish, plants or fish and plants are raised in systems that recycle and reuse water and waste.

In New Orleans, our organization has both a community garden where we teach classes, have demonstration systems and neighbors grow food in their own raised garden beds, and a market farm where we grow food for sale at lower rates to provide better access to healthy fresh food for the community.

We are currently working with veterans in several ways:

A. Through our New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development program supported by the USDA - we offer training, specifically targeted to underserved communities, women and veterans to start, or improve and expand their own growing operations to create economically and ecologically sustainable jobs in agriculture businesses. We have been working closely with several veterans in a heightened capacity from the trainings - for example one wants to create her own growing space for other veterans to come and learn to grow, another works with at risk youth. We are supporting them in creating recirculating farm systems at their growing sites.

B. We are developing and looking forward to offering a special vets program – in recirculating (water-based) farming. We learned these growing methods are especially useful for more senior or disabled vets – they are very versatile in design and so inspire creativity, they can be inside or outdoors and so offer flexibility, growing food often leads to healthier eating, and socializing, and in terms of physical requirements these systems are usually vertical – in towers, or elevated in beds, so they don't require much bending and there is no weeding!

So if any vets out there are interested in learning more about incorporating aquatic systems into agriculture – please get in touch. You can find us at [recirculatingfarms.org](http://recirculatingfarms.org)