



## **\$25,000 Donation Given to Giff Hill School Aquaponics Program**

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This week, a significant donation made to Giff Hill School will ensure the continued success and expansion of the school’s aquaponics and hydroponics program. Island Green Living president Harith Wickrema, who donated the aquaponics system to the school on behalf of Island Green in December 2020, gave \$25,000 this week to further fund a program that has found great success at GHS.

“We want students to develop a passion for agriculture and food security,” said Wickrema.



Middle school students Isabel Magro and Jacori Laurencin add seedlings to the aquaponics system.  
(Photo courtesy of Giff Hill School)

Since implementing the aquaponics system at the GHS Upper Campus, students have been in charge of taking care of the tilapia, whose waste provides nutrients for the herbs and greens grown in the soil-free system. The students monitor the system's water quality and oversee the growth and harvest of the plants in various STEAM-related classes. Students have also harvested tilapia from the system, which they used to make fish tacos in culinary class. The plant growth has also been a considerable success, and GHS now supplies microgreens to Shaibu's Grab and Go restaurant in The Marketplace.





Middle school student Brooklyn Payne shows off a fish taco made with tilapia from the school's aquaponics system. (Photo courtesy of Giff Hill School)



“The aquaponics system fits well with our mission of providing experience-based multi-disciplinary learning,” said GHS Head of School Ken Mills. “We want the program to grow, not just physically by growing more plants or adding more fish tanks, but across disciplines. Students who aren’t interested in agriculture can experience the development of marketing and business plans.”



Middle school student Gleidy Castillo Caraballo harvests some greens from the aquaponics system.  
(Photo courtesy of Giff Hill School)

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The aquaponics system is ideal for piquing students’ interest in Virgin Islands agriculture, Mills added, as the system is meant to conserve water and it doesn’t require soil, two precious resources in the territory. GHS Upper Campus STEAM teacher Dean Walczak said he looks forward to adding fruiting plants to the aquaponics system. Wickrema noted the myriad of benefits of encouraging students’ interest in agriculture.

“We reduce health care costs because children eat better when they’re a part of growing fresh foods,” he said. “By reducing importation, we cut down the carbon footprint and the packaging material that goes into the landfill. There’s a plethora of ripple effects.”