



Aquaculture without Frontiers

Field notes from Nepal: Researching with the Agriculture and Forestry University

By: Samantha Farquhar

After graduating from the University of North Carolina Wilmington a semester early, I decided rather than moving back home and laying around to take advantage of my free time. I had just finished working with the nonprofit, The Full Belly Project, and was interested in gaining more experience with sustainable development so I began looking for opportunities that coincided with my fresh degrees of Marine Biology and International Studies. This oddly enough led me to the landlocked country of Nepal. Working with the Asian Institute of Technology, I was sent to Rampur, Nepal to stay at the Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU) and carry out research on a recent aquaculture project that was started to increase household economic and nutrition security especially among women.

Aquaculture in Nepal is a fairly new activity starting in the 1950s and has since grown considerably—at a rate of 8.4%. In 2013, aquaculture in Nepal produced a record amount of 43,500mt. The industry is particularly growing in the flat area of Nepal known as the Terai Plain. This area accounts for 84% of the total country's aquaculture production.

It is in this area where I have been conducting research. I have been working in a nearby community that started farming fish in the early 2000s. When I go to the field, AFU faculty and I wander throughout the community and conduct

home surveys. If there is anything I have learned from this, it's that the Nepali are incredibly welcoming. The first thing I can count on when approaching someone for an interview is them running to find a chair then promptly telling us to, "Bosnus!" (sit). The interviews are often interrupted due to the interviewees feeling the need to suddenly cook something for us such as tea or potatoes or give us fresh fruit. Once, a kind woman even gave me her baby to hold. So far, the women interviewed have all reported that fish farming has benefited them economically and nationally. They also report that it gives a feeling of security for their future.

Many of the women have started and joined a cooperative. They go on to report that the cooperative has given them benefits such as the self-confidence in speaking and education as they continue to participate in workshops. Other benefits of the cooperative include access to loans and savings.



Working with AFU students on the Department's ponds

<http://www.aquaculturewithoutfrontiers.org/>

When my ability to go to the field is delayed due to various Hindu holidays and logistics in general, I am welcomed to sit in on classes and participate in labs at AFU. This has allowed me to really get to know the faculty and students from the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries. I have been sincerely touched by their kindness and hospitality.



While in the field, holding a cute baby from one of the surveyed homes

The students here are some of the most hardworking and eager I have ever met. They take on average 8 classes a semester in addition to practicals. Classes cover a broad range of topics. Students learn of everything from fish disease and pathogens to breeding methods to co-management to fish physiology. In the last semester of the 4 year

program, the students will be placed in a 6 month long field experience in which they will conduct research. This research is then written into a thesis and defended in front of their research committees. Only then will they earn their degree. This hands-on comprehensive program would not be anything if it was not implemented by AFU's hardworking faculty. I've observed that the relationships teachers have with students here are sincere and encouraging. They push their students to reach their full potential and care about their general wellbeing and future.

Despite enduring all this rigorous coursework, the students always invite me along for an afternoon snack or *khaja*. Along with trying to teach me Nepali, we will spend afternoons discussing culture differences, our families, and our

future goals. Almost all have expressed to me that they would like to pursue a master's degree in a related field. They are constantly looking for ways to apply their education. This being said, it is no surprise then that after hearing of Aquaculture without Frontiers many of the AFU students are joining. I sincerely hope that the AwF family will show them the kindness and encouragement that they have shown me.



AFU students and me working on a practical



AFU's Department of Aquaculture Fisheries helping me celebrate my 22nd birthday

A note about the author:

Samantha Farquhar is a new member of AwF, but is looking forward to getting involved. After working in Nepal, she hopes to attend graduate school in the fall.