



Urban Farmer Sells Affordable Fruits and Veggies, Envisions Skyscraper Farms

Will Allen, Ex-NBA Player, Now Urban Farmer

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When most people think of farms, they think flat, endless fields of corn or wheat in the heartland of the American Midwest.

When former professional basketball player Will Allen thinks of farms, he thinks community centers and, maybe later, skyscrapers.

Allen, 59, is CEO of Growing Power, an organization that built a farm right in the middle of a Milwaukee residential neighborhood to help feed the community's residents affordably in a practice known as urban farming.

Although the farm is relatively tiny at 2 acres, it can produce enough food to sustain 2,000 people.

"Well, my goal has always been to feed people healthy, safe, affordable food and make sure that everybody has access to the same food, regardless of your economic situation," Allen told "Good Morning America."

Such vision has earned Allen a \$500,000 "genius grant" from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to continue and expand his efforts.

According to Sophie Brown of Growing Power, a \$16 bag filled to the brim with Growing Power's fruits and vegetables, along with those of other local growers, could feed a family of four for a week.

"I wanted to set up a program that was fair farm prices that they're paying for that stuff and can afford it," Allen, the son of a sharecropper, said last week. "They can eat healthy."

The farm uses greenhouse technology to allow compost piles to heat the plants even enough to survive the Wisconsin winter. The farm also features an innovative three-level growing system in which fish naturally filter the waste out of water and the clean water is redistributed among the plants.

"You can grow just about anything, anywhere you want," Allen said.

While Allen is already more than willing to tell people how to set up similar farms in their own communities, according to his son Jason, the inner city is the focus of Allen's attention.

"He focuses a lot on urban and inner cities," Jason said. "All you see is fast-food places. To have something like this in an inner city is real important."

That space is generally hard to come by in America's inner cities does not phase Allen; he simply plans to build vertical farm skyscrapers.

"I see food growing on rooftops," he said, lost in his vision of the future. "I see food growing on asphalt with compost."

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