

Chicago boasts its Growing Power

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European chefs are trained to know the source of the food they use. They would never dare include vegetables in a salad without knowing where on the continent their greens originated. This is where American chefs traditionally lag behind, as they usually order from mega wholesalers with little connection to place and palette.

Here in Chicago the food we eat too often comes from the west coast or south of the border, and the chef preparing it, or the consumer buying it, has little idea how the food was harvested and ended up on Midwestern shelves.

Enter Growing Power, a leader in urban agriculture based in Milwaukee but now active in Chicago too. The organization was founded by a former professional basketball player named Will Allen who grew up poor on a rural Maryland farm and then jumped at the chance to sink his hands back into the soil after leaving his sneakers on the court and working in the corporate world for a decade. Growing Power is a leader in taking vacant city land and turning it into areas where people can grow food and, equally as important, keep the garden in the local community. Allen's daughter Erika runs Growing Power's activities in Chicago, and here in the Windy City, the organization has its hands in plenty of innovative activities.

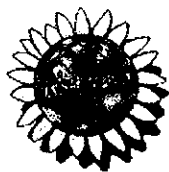


Last year Growing Power hauled in 100,000 pounds of compost from its base in Milwaukee to build a garden at the Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park where the city traditionally plants flowers. Will Allen added red worms and employed his "livable biological brewing system, in which the worms break down the food waste to make the soil fertile — so rich in nutrients that he could plant more crops in a relatively small space.

Worms don't make your mouth water? For those who want to sample the results of Growing Power's work with the community, pay a visit to the local Kendall College's School of Culinary Arts, which is working with Growing Power in an effort to help students understand where their food comes from. Kendall even has a restaurant within the college, so diners can enjoy tasty salads filled with greens grown right here in town. Its healthy, and it's home grown. Eat up!

Photo by Jenna Dickinson and Tim Inklebarger, "The Skillet Lickers."

Together we are....



GROWING POWER

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Home

Up

Will Allen, Executive Director of Growing Power, has been named as one of 17 recipients of a Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World award. The 17 awardees, chosen by a national selection committee from a pool of nearly 1,000 nominations, are individuals and leadership teams tackling some of the nation's entrenched social, economic and environmental challenges. "These leaders are a welcome reminder that people can make a difference" said Susan V. Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation. "They have brought not only concrete gains to their communities but a determination to stand for justice that builds hope and inspires others. Its never been more important to listen to them" (Riverwest Currents newspaper, November 2005)

Over 5,000 visitors this year came to the Growing Power Community Food Center for tours and workshops.

Over 400 tons of food waste composted and diverted from landfills through our large scale composting operations. This food waste was converted into valuable compost used for Milwaukee and Chicago area community based urban agriculture projects.

Growing Power provided comprehensive outreach trainings in 6 states (California, Illinois, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and the Blackfeet Nation in Montana) as well as Toronto, Canada.

Growing Power hosted 7 well attended national hands on trainings at the Growing Power Community Food Center in Milwaukee. Participants from diverse backgrounds included urban and rural farmers, educators, youth, community activists and Immigrant farmers.

Growing Power established an Advisory Council for our Chicago office to assist in strategic planning, fundraising and visibility in Chicago.

The Growing Power youth corp enjoyed a successful summer of hands on work days at the Community Food Center, field trips to local farms, and planting and harvesting at our rural farm site at the Boys' and Girls' Club camp in Waukesha County. The youth corp has added 2 more members to our retail store employee roster, a former senior youth corp member has joined our office staff and a young man with strong leadership skills and dedication became our first Chicago junior intern.

Growing Power has worked with numerous Milwaukee area public, private and alternative schools, university service learners, church groups, and community service volunteers providing them with hands on educational opportunities in food systems.

Our rural farm site is continuing to develop as a training area for immigrant farming projects and youth projects such as the Growing Power youth corp and Urban Farm Girls program. Our first hoop greenhouse was constructed at this site for year round growing projects.

The Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council continues to develop policy strategies to promote food security. Planning is in process for a 1st annual summit on food security in Chicago. Erika Allen, Growing Power Chicago Project Manager, is co-chair of the council.

The Market Basket program continues to grow. Market Baskets are distributed throughout Milwaukee and Chicago at over 25 different sites including schools, businesses, universities and community based sites. Total Average weekly distribution: 250 baskets

Grant Park, Chicago, IL - Urban Agriculture Potager Growing Power partnered with the Chicago Park District and Moore Landscapes to create a 20,000 square foot urban farm on Chicago's lakefront adjacent to the Buckingham Fountain. Over 150 varieties of heirloom vegetables, herbs and edible flowers were grown and distributed to area food pantries and soup kitchens. Assisting Growing Power's staff were 15 youth from nearby communities, employed to learn how to grow food. This urban agriculture project produced over 6 tons of food with a market value of \$15,000. Grant Park was also the site for the Farm Aid press conference for the 20th anniversary concert with Willie Nelson and John Cougar Mellencamp.

HomeGrown Chicago is a project that connects urban community residents with the ability to grow and sell organic produce and fruits, to create value added products for household consumption and, to market their products at a community-operated, open air market that highlights Puerto Rican traditions including music, dance, visual art demonstrations, and performances. There are three partners on this project: Growing Power, Inc., The Puerto Rican Cultural Center's project: Co-op Humboldt and OpenLands Project.

In 2005 a total of 23 gardens were supported with 3 large sites dedicated solely for the purpose of food production for the Homegrown Market.

Cabrini Green, Chicago Avenue Community Garden Partnership: Growing Power worked in partnership with the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago to facilitate a large-scale community garden adjacent to the Cabrini Green row houses. Growing Power provided youth programming for 10 area youth, ages 6-14, and 2 staff to assist community gardeners and youth with the installation of 2 youth gardens.