

Will Allen (center) posed for a photo with Haitians Herode Laurent (left) and Daniel Tillas during their recent visit to Growing Power.

Global Giving

GROWING POWER BRINGS THE
"GOOD FOOD REVOLUTION" TO HAITI

BY JEN HUNHOLZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HAAS

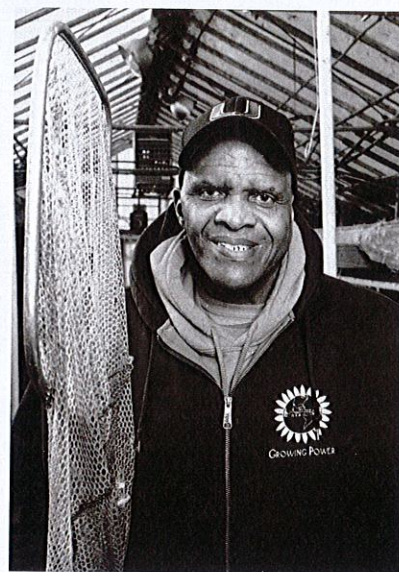
Will Allen, founder and CEO of Growing Power, is on a mission to change the world's food systems — one country at a time. "Over the 22 years we've been in business, we've moved along the continuum to be able to work with people throughout the world," says Allen. Growing Power's success has taken Allen and his team to all corners of the world, from Kenya to Ukraine, and this April, they'll embark on a new adventure, traveling to Haiti to assist a developing urban agriculture program in Port-au-Prince.

The trip is part of Growing Power's Haiti initiative — a partnership born out of Allen's relationship with the former U.S. ambassador to Haiti, Michael Macy. In the wake of the country's tragic earthquake, Macy wanted to implement a program that empowered Haitians to grow and produce their own food using new systems and compost soil, so he called Allen. Allen agreed to help, and two Haitians flew to Milwaukee earlier this year to tour Growing Power's local facility, where Allen demonstrated how to build and operate his highly efficient aquaponics system. He will travel to Haiti later this month to ensure the trainees' new system is functioning properly.

The system, which costs very little to construct, is "simply a replication of a clean stream river," says Allen, employing a recirculating method to raise lake perch and tilapia. Water is drained from a 5,000-gallon tank into a gravel bed, where fish waste is converted into nitrogen. The filtered water is then pumped into raised plant beds, which usually house salad greens and tomatoes, and finally back into the tank of fish. Allen, who created the aquaponics system several years ago, says that a 5,000-gallon tank is able to raise about 4,000 fish.

The foundations of the aquaponic system — its easy-to-use, sustainable model and low construction and operating costs — align with Growing Power's commitment to making nutrient-dense food more readily accessible and available, a process Allen describes as the "good food revolution." He stresses the importance of providing healthy food to the people of Haiti, who are often forced to rely on processed foodstuffs imported by neighboring countries. "I believe the only way to change the food systems in the world is to do it at the local level and to empower people and create jobs," explains Allen. "We just have to make sure that the poor and disfranchised people and communities all over the world get the chance to partake in this living wage food system."

Changing the way food systems are run worldwide is no simple endeavor, but one that Allen and his team remain admirably dedicated to. Their approach is multicultural and multigenerational — everyone is encouraged to participate, regardless of their age, race or socioeconomic status. "I think the most powerful thing we do is to inspire people to go into action and do what we do," Allen says. "We talk a lot about doing stuff and then we never do it. So to get people to go into action is what I want to see happen. All of us can talk to a certain degree, but few go into action."



Some of Growing Power's own action plans target youth, a population that Allen believes to be especially influential. He recognizes that younger people, a technology-savvy generation privy to immediate results, would not respond well to traditional methods of farming, which often require intense labor and a hefty time commitment. But the chance to work at a food-secure community like Growing Power's heated, indoor facility on Silver Spring Drive? That's a much more appealing opportunity, he says, and one that successfully engages a younger demographic.

And although Allen says that Growing Power receives requests for new jobs almost daily, it's clear that his "job" is far from being categorized as work — it's a life passion. "This isn't a job," he says with a laugh. "This is just fun." To learn more about Growing Power and how to get involved, go to growingpower.org. **M**

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