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# Planting the Seed

WILL ALLEN'S GROWING POWER PUTS HEALTHY FOOD ON EVERY PLATE.

BY LEAH DOBKIN

**WHO • WILL ALLEN, 61**

**MISSION** • To promote urban gardening, particularly in low-income neighborhoods where people might not otherwise have access to fresh and healthy food. "I want to be part of the revolution that changes how we grow, distribute and eat food so that the process is healthier for people and the planet," Allen says. He started Growing Power—a greenhouse complex that cultivates organic food and teaches people how to produce their own—in Milwaukee in 1993. He also operates farms in Chicago and rural Merton, Wisconsin, and has teamed with Michelle Obama's program to fight childhood obesity.

**MOTIVATION** • "Food doesn't just sustain our bodies—it can heal them," Allen says, adding that wealth shouldn't dictate access to healthy food. By teaching people how to grow organically and close to home, he is also helping to cut down on fuel emissions from transportation, thereby reducing pollution. "Much of our soil is contaminated," he says. "One of our challenges is not just to grow healthier food, but to grow healthier soil."

**HOOP DREAMS** • Prior to his career as an urban farmer, Allen played in the American Basketball Association and professionally in Belgium between 1971 and 1978. When he retired from the sport at age 28, he did a 15-year stint in marketing at The Marcus Corporation and Procter & Gamble before going back to the land. "I was raised on a six-acre farm," he says. "I went back to my roots to start a farm in Milwaukee to keep my hands in the dirt." **///**

Learn more at [growingpower.org](http://growingpower.org)