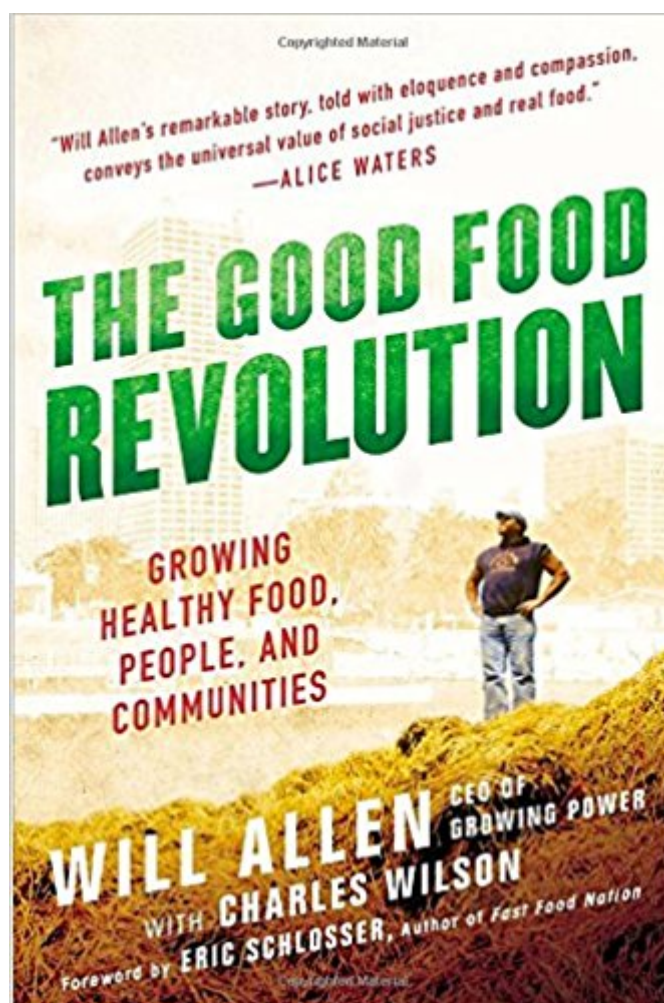


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The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, And Communities



Synopsis

A pioneering urban farmer and MacArthur Genius Award-Winner points the way to building a new food system that can feed- and heal- communities. The son of a sharecropper, Will Allen had no intention of ever becoming a farmer himself. But after years in professional basketball and as an executive for Kentucky Fried Chicken and Procter & Gamble, he cashed in his retirement fund for a two-acre plot just outside Milwaukee's largest public housing project. The area was a food desert with only convenience stores and fast-food restaurants to serve the needs of locals. Despite financial challenges and daunting odds, Allen built the country's preeminent urban farm-a food and educational center that now produces enough produce and fish year-round to feed thousands. Employing young people from the neighboring housing project and community, Growing Power shows how local food systems can help troubled youths, dismantle racism, create jobs, bring urban and rural communities closer together, and improve public health. Today, Allen's organization helps develop community food systems across the country. An eco-classic in the making, *The Good Food Revolution* is the story of Will's personal journey, the lives he has touched, and a grassroots movement that is changing the way our nation eats.

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Customer Reviews

"Will Allen's remarkable story, told with eloquence and compassion, conveys the universal value of social justice and real food." — Alice Waters
"From the plots of his Milwaukee urban farm to low-income communities across America, Will Allen has shown us a new type of heroism. Through *The Good Food Revolution*, Allen recounts his effort to reclaim his family's heritage

and, in doing so, confront lingering disparities in racial and economic justice. As the champion of a new and promising movement, Allen is skillfully leading Americans to face one of our greatest domestic issues – our health. Former President Bill Clinton “Not only compelling but a treatise on how our country supplies food and how the absence of a grocery store in your hood is no excuse for not finding a good way to feed your family good food.” Ebony “What Allen does with a small plot of land and a lot of determination is nothing short of inspiring. A moving story of one man’s success in producing healthy food for those who need it the most.” Kirkus Reviews “Far more than a book about food, *The Good Food Revolution* captivates your heart and mind with the sheer passion of compelling and righteous innovation. Wow!” Joel Salatin, Author and Farmer at Polyface Farm, Inc. “Will Allen is a hero and an inspiration to urban farmers everywhere. Now, with *The Good Food Revolution*, we learn how Allen rediscovered the power of agriculture, and in doing so transformed a city, its community, and eventually the world – with the help of millions of red wiggler worms. Told with grace and utter honesty, I found myself cheering for Allen and his organization, Growing Power.” Novella Carpenter, Author of *Farm City* and *The Essential Urban Farmer* “Generously and forthrightly sharing his life story and his passions as he makes the case for a new food system, Allen inspires us to move beyond self-interest when considering greener and healthier food. Assisted by the able writing of journalist Charles Wilson, Allen gives us the straight talk we yearn to hear from politicians. [These gripping personal stories woven through the narrative provide a strong foundation for Allen’s incisive historical and social commentary.] *The Good Food Revolution* is a real-world guidebook to positive change.” Real Change News “The *Good Food Revolution* is the kind of book you just can’t put down, rich with personal stories, and full of insightful lessons about business and life that transcend the food industry. There are fundamental lessons in Allen’s work that all leaders can learn from.” 800 CEO Read/Blog “Mr. Allen’s connection to his sharecropper roots may open the way against the larger stigma against raising our own food: a need to escape from an occupation equated with poverty and inequality.” Karen Tallant, Booksellers at Laurewood

After retiring from professional basketball and executive positions at Kentucky Fried Chicken and Procter & Gamble, Will Allen became the CEO of Growing Power. He lives in Milwaukee. Charles Wilson is a journalist and the coauthor with Eric Schlosser of the #1 New York Times bestselling children’s book *Chew on This: Everything You Don’t Want to Know About Fast Food*.

Currently, one of the issues we face as a society are these combined destructive elements of

industrial, large-scale agriculture. This is a story of a professional basketball player to a big executive with Kentucky Fried Chicken and Proctor and Gamble to now an urban farmer in the city of Milwaukee. Will Allen turned his retirement fund into a two-acre plot investment of passion in hopes of transforming an urban food desert into an effervescent community rich of colorful fruits and vegetables the people can thrive on. Owner of an organization called Growing Power, which is an internationally-recognized trailblazer in sustainable urban farming, Will Allen does a remarkable job in providing motivation and insight to create, build, and maintain a better food system. It's through this lens of an African American experience on how the son of a sharecropper meant to escape the life of a farmer, only to learn he never really could, or wanted to. Not only is Allen's own story rich of determination and survival, but it's also the incredible people he meets along the way to assist him in his cultivating new food movement. This book is more than just a story, it's also a way to get people more involved with food and how to grow it, cultivate it, sustain it, and enjoy it in the process. Its practicality can be incorporated into classrooms of schools all over the world. Society needs more passionate individuals with a desire to make a difference and change that involves leaving this world better for the next generation. Every life serves a purpose. Reading books and diving into the lives of others such as this can help discover your own purpose. Will Allen states "Urban farming is the future of farming." This book is a great way for kids to get involved and how to grow food, know where it comes from, and how to create a sustainable future in farming.

Will Allen's story is not just inspirational, but deeply moving! His intuition and bravery in the face of overwhelming odds gives courage to his readers to make the tough changes the food paradigm in this country desperately needs! Not to mention the fact that it's a great read!

The Good Food Revolution is the best book I've read in a long time. My interest in local and urban agriculture drew me to the book; the intimate stories of individuals and communities that frame that meta-narrative drew me into it. The book arrived on Wednesday. Despite an excessively busy schedule, I had completed it by early Saturday morning, often forgoing much-needed sleep because I simply could not put it down. The rich and engaging stories of individuals and their relationships to one another through family, community, and politics are told through the lenses of race, economics, and, of course, agriculture, all woven together by Will Allen in a style that is at once eloquent and folksy; comprehensive and intimate. Through engaging vignettes, Will Allen's The Good Food Revolution provides glimpses into the history of this nation, with particular emphasis on the different

experiences of people of different races. The story is deeply personal, yet told in a way that we can all feel like we are a part of it and of the future envisioned by Will Allen. Will Allen shares stories of past and present racial inequality in a tone that is likely to draw people in, rather than make people feel either guilty or entitled. Unlike the judgmental and accusatory tone often found in such accounts, Mr. Allen's gentle and understanding tone allows him to capture the extreme difficulties faced by people of color without alienating others. By handling even the most shameful aspects of our nation's history with grace and tact, Mr. Allen was able to draw me into the stories without feeling like a would-be savior or presumed culprit for our divided history. Rather, I felt like an invited guest to our shared future. Mr. Allen tells the story of environmental damage wrought by modern agricultural practices in much the same tone, with understanding towards those who are practicing out of ignorance - even admitting some of his own less-than-best practices over the years. This approach is far more likely to result in converts to his way of thinking than the acerbic, arrogant, and accusatory tone that often seem to underlie discussions of both agriculture and race these days. Mr. Allen, who describes himself as a muscular 6'7", seems to have an awareness of the effectiveness of this approach: I also recognized there was a power in being both huge and polite; I invoked fear in people and allayed it at the same time. (p. 69). By approaching the topic in this way, my eyes were opened to things I wasn't fully aware of before and I was very receptive to hearing it from him. For example, I'm a big proponent of the local food movement and of organic and sustainable agricultural practices. I believe that much of our public policy favors BigAg at the expense of the little guy. Mr. Allen showed me that many of those "little guys" are black farmers: "For black farmers in the twentieth century who outlasted the upheaval of the Great Migration [northward], there were more subtle forces that drove them off their land. In 1982, the bipartisan U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report called 'The Decline of Black Farming in America' that attempted to understand why black farmers were leaving the profession at a rate of two and a half times greater than that of whites. The committee found that one important reason was that black farmers were small farmers. . . . Almost all of the technological innovations that the United States government had subsidized over the previous decades, the authors acknowledged, were geared toward increasing the productivity of large farms -- and not to making small farms sustainable." There's a lot packed into that quote, including public policy (subsidies), the dangers of over-efficiency in farming, and the racial disparities in loss of farming opportunities. Most importantly, it speaks to our united interest in supporting small, local farmers. Through this and similar sentiments scattered throughout the book, I discovered an unanticipated affinity with people of color, coming to the recognition that they feel even more acutely than others the effects of policies and procedures that are not helpful or

sustainable for any of us. It educated me about the challenges facing urban farmers without shaming me for my prior ignorance. This is also reflected in Mr. Allen's description of his intentional method of helping young people want to eat real food - not through lecturing them, but by allowing them to be part of the experience. In describing the findings of a study about young people and nutritional habits, Mr. Allen relates: "The researchers found no significant difference a year later in the vegetable and fruit consumption of children without nutrition education and those who received nutrition classes. The students who received hands-on training in a garden, however, increased their fruit and vegetable intake by more than two servings a day. My own experience tells me that if we can expose young people more often to fresh, delicious food - and create positive emotions around those experiences - that we increase the chances that they will adopt more fresh food into their diet as they begin to make independent food choices later in life." (p. 161)

The Good Food Revolution frequently uses gardening and agriculture as a metaphor for life: "My father taught me that the fate of a seed can be predicted by the health of the soil where it takes root. This is true of summer crops. It can be true, in another sense, of people. We all need a healthy environment and a community that lets us fulfill our potential." (p.63)

He later described vermiposting in similar terms: "The worms also made me reflect again on what it took to improve the lives of people. You couldn't place folks in the middle of a blighted neighborhood -- without a strong family unit and without easy access to healthy food -- and expect them to thrive. If you could create an environment in which people felt secure and healthy, though, you could provide the possibility of a better life." A counter-balance to this is the story of Karen Parker, who overcame significant obstacles to thrive in the urban agriculture environment. He summed up her experience using another metaphor: "Sometimes on the sidewalks of Milwaukee, there will be a flower or a tall weed sticking defiantly out of the tiniest crack in the concrete. I realize that human lives can be like that. People find a way to persist even when they are provided the narrowest opportunity." Wisdom about the value of patience and adversity, among other things, are also woven throughout the book. In a chapter introduction entitled "Grit," Will compares humans to worms, which need to have "just the right amount" of hard material in their diet in order to break down compost, "Human beings need the right amount of grit: not too much, but not too little, either." (p. 207)

In addition to the broader philosophical themes, the book offers plenty of sound, practical advice for the would-be gardener, non-profit organization, or even small business start-up. For the gardener, there is specific information about the ratio of elements needed for good compost, specific measurements of Growing Power's aquaponics equipment, and descriptions of techniques for planting, cultivating, and even preparing produce. For the non-profit or for-profit business, the book includes a very

transparent look at the thought processes that underlie the successes - and failures - that brought both Will Allen and Growing Power to where they are today. The book describes various challenges faced by Mr. Allen and the organization, and describes the problem-solving techniques used to overcome them. One example is the description of how he and a number of other farmers at a local farmers market decided to organize themselves into a co-op after facing the prospect of being shut down due to city budget constraints. The practical advice and philosophical themes work together to inspire the reader to live a fulfilling life by harnessing her unique gifts, talents, experiences, and passions into something meaningful. Mr. Allen doesn't sugar-coat the value or necessity of hard work and perseverance - it is detailed on every page. But, he also highlights the rewards that can come from working hard at a meaningful endeavor. The book covers a lot of ground and tells the story of many people, but it is not the least bit disjointed. In fact, I would say that the integrated way the book was put together with diverse people, circumstances, and events, is a reflection of the type of community envisioned within its pages. Amy M. Salberg, A.K.A. The Real Food Lawyer

What a great book this is. This is not just the story of Will Allen's journey through Urban Agriculture, but also the story of his family's hardships and struggles coming North, up and out of South Carolina after the Civil War. It is a lesson in patience, family, and compassion. The Good Food Revolution has Allen take us on his journey that started before he was born, with his family in South Carolina. Sharecropping was no way to make a living in the south according to his mother, so she took her family north for a chance to make a better life for her family. Allen, growing up in Maryland, hated farming with his father. However, he did so out of fear and respect for the man. Those skills and passions that were sown as a young man in Maryland began to sprout many years later while Allen was working as a salesman in Milwaukee. And with years of hard work, trial and error, and support from many well-meaning friends (which Allen shares their amazing stories as well) he was able to begin to reap the rewards of his vision to provide for and nourish communities in need. As a teacher, I would recommend this to other teachers for summer reading. It has deep lessons in patience and perseverance. We don't always see the benefits of our lessons right away. The student may not see them for years or even recognize that the thought could have been planted for years. If we can find time to plant quality instruction and provide the student with the support, they can grow in to wonderful and successful adults.

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