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Milwaukee's Good Food Movement

By Sarah Biondich



They are the people who will not leave this planet without first bettering it, the citizens who simply cannot live their lives ignoring the fact that they share a community with people who are suffering from hunger. The individuals devoted to improving Milwaukee's food system contribute to the movement for various reasons—be it economic, social, environmental, spiritual, personal, educational or a combination of such—but the end result is the same: Milwaukee is a better place because the people listed below live and work here. Our city certainly doesn't lack for heroes, and this list hardly captures the swelling number of folks who improve Milwaukee every day by making sure their neighbors have safe, equitable access to healthy food, but these individuals and the organizations they work with are contributing on a tremendous scale and deserve special recognition for their hard work.

Will Allen, Growing Power

There are many cities in the United States making important strides in urban agriculture, but they don't have Will Allen. The founder and CEO of Growing Power has not only put Milwaukee on the urban ag map, he has catapulted our city to capital-status. His genius is in the way he has formulated his methodology for cultivating, harvesting and delivering healthy foods and serving the very real need of feeding people. A prolific and inspiring speaker, Allen is constantly teaching others the way of urban ag, which means the everyday operation of Growing Power is often in the hands of his devoted army of staff, interns and volunteers.

Martha Davis Kipeak, Center for Resilient Cities

When Davis Kipeak joined the Center for Resilient Cities—a nonprofit organization that garners public and private resources to provide the infrastructure and assistance needed to help underserved communities thrive and be resilient—as food program manager in July, she brought with her years of experience working to help individuals empower and nourish themselves. Davis Kipeak explains that what she does—as a regional governor for Slow Food USA, as a member of Growing Power's board of directors, or as a member of the Milwaukee Food Council—is simply hospitality. She “brings people to the table” because “to do transforming food system work means to do it in a very relational way.”

Deb Deacon, The Milwaukee County Winter Farmers' Market

Armed with an encyclopedic knowledge of Wisconsin farmers' markets that only comes from visiting 30 to 40 a year, Deacon hit the ground running when she decided to open Milwaukee's first winter farmers' market at State Fair Park last year. The market allows purchases to be made with QUEST Cards (debit cards for food stamps), so in addition to extending the season for farmers wanting to sell their goods, the market also gives low-income households access to high-quality, locally produced vegetables, fruit, cheese and meat for an extra six months.

Paulette Flynn, SHARE

Paulette Flynn founded SHARE with other like-minded individuals in San Diego in 1983 to help people who did not want to be on public assistance, but who needed to stretch their food dollars. SHARE, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary in Wisconsin this year, provides access to good, nutritious food at a reduced cost through a volunteer-run, community-based distribution system. Flynn, who is responsible for purchasing all of the food that SHARE distributes to more than 20,000 people per month, is particularly proud of the organization's Mobile Market program, a food sale service that brings high-quality, healthy foods at affordable prices to Milwaukee neighborhoods.

Josh Fraundorf and James Godsil, Sweet Water Organics

Inspired by Will Allen's Growing Power, Fraundorf and Godsil created the world's first large-scale commercial aquaponic fish and vegetable farm in a repurposed factory building. The owners' goal is to help stimulate a leading 21st-century industry that provides jobs, produces sustainable food and helps revitalize the city's unused manufacturing buildings, a mission that is exhaustively detailed on Godsil's online resource www.MilwaukeeRenaissance.com. Fraundorf and Godsil strive for a lasting, positive social impact through Sweet Water's nonprofit foundation, which is developing programs in education and for kids at risk.

Young Kim, Fondy Food Center

Before becoming executive director of the Fondy Food Center in 2003, Young Kim likened his past work experience “to being handed a bucket and told to run around and catch rainwater leaking through the ceiling.” The work he's doing at Fondy, connecting Milwaukee's North Side with locally grown food from farm to table, is “climbing on the roof and patching the leak.” The center also operates and manages the Fondy Farmers Market, one of the city's largest producer-only markets, which attracts 3,000-4,000 visitors a week, as well as a number of programs that aim to remove barriers that prevent people from having good, clean food at fair prices.

Gretchen Mead, Victory Garden Initiative

“We're looking for a cultural paradigm shift,” says Gretchen Mead, director of the Victory Garden Initiative. After a career as a clinical social worker, Mead felt she could make a larger impact if she could transform the ailing food system that was encumbering her clients. If you're not going to join this charming and magnetic dynamo on her mission to grow food in all places—back yards, front yards, rooftops and patios—get out of her way. She is a prolific community organizer with a gift for empowering others to become leaders.

Kymm Mutch, Milwaukee Public Schools Nutrition Services

As director of nutrition services for MPS, Mutch is responsible for feeding our city's children, serving 31,000 breakfasts, 57,000 lunches and 6,000 after-school snacks per school day. Along with her master's degree in counseling and 25 years of experience working as a dietitian focusing on child and adolescent nutrition, Mutch brings an entrepreneurial spirit to her work. MPS students are enjoying whole-grain breads, fresh fruits and a variety of vegetables because of the relationships Mutch has forged with local suppliers, like Growing Power.

