

FOOD FOR ALL



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ore than 1 million children go to bed hungry every night in the United States. Last fall, one in eight adults and one in four children were receiving food stamps, with the number of recipients growing by 20,000 per day. And across the country, the nearest available food for millions of Americans in low-income communities is usually high in fat or sugar, courtesy of neighborhood fast-food joints and convenience stores.

In the land of plenty, there is plenty of need for good, nutritious food at a reasonable price.

Fortunately, increasing numbers of individuals and groups are stepping up to develop programs or to push for local, state and federal support to provide more nutritious food in underserved communities. Former pro basketball player Will Allen created a Milwaukee-based organization that's internationally known for helping low-income communities produce their own fresh food. PolicyLink, an equity research and advocacy nonprofit headquartered in Oakland, Calif., includes among its priorities improving access to healthy food for poor and working-class residents of urban and rural communities.

One of the programs PolicyLink highlights as a national exemplar is the six-year-old Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, a public-private partnership that has helped open or upgrade 86 grocery and other food stores in underserved communities, including several in the Pittsburgh region. These stores, in turn, have created or preserved 5,023 full- or part-time jobs. As a result of advocacy by PolicyLink, the mid-Atlantic-focused Reinvestment Fund and the Philadelphia-based Food Trust, President Obama has proposed including \$345 million in next year's federal budget for the creation of a Healthy Food Financing Initiative, which is modeled after the Pennsylvania program and promoted in First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign to reduce childhood obesity.

On a smaller but still important scale, local food banks and grass-roots entrepreneurs and advocates are doing their part to offer nutritious food options to low-income individuals. Among them are some Endowments grantees whose missions encourage better nutrition with the goal of holistically healthier families and communities. *h*

—Carmen Lee, *h* staff



FOOD FOR PEACE

First Person: Valerie Dixon, restorative justice coordinator, Center for Victims of Violent Crimes

Valerie Dixon shares her experience as a participant in the center's EVE—Enlightened Voices for the Environment—Project. The program promotes understanding of environmental risks that contribute to conflict and crime. A recipient of nearly \$200,000 in Endowments support, it encourages healthy eating through activities such as field trips to Healcrest Urban Community Farm, below. This is Dixon's story:

For more than 20 years, I struggled with my weight. Meat was my meal. I would just eat a piece of meat or two, have something to drink and consider that dinner. Pork chops were a weekly ritual. Fruits and vegetables were canned or frozen, if any. I never really recognized how sluggish I got after every meal. I never made the connection between what I ate and how I felt. I only thought I was overworked.

My health condition worsened after my 22-year-old son Robert was shot to death in 2001. I tried several methods to deal with my trauma. Many of the techniques I used involved helping others, but I was not taking good care of myself. It wasn't intentional; it sort of came with the territory of trauma-related healing. Then my doctor told me I was definitely a candidate for either a stroke or a heart attack. I had to acknowledge the severe health issues I had developed due to stress, sleeplessness, high blood pressure and other problems. I needed to make some drastic changes in my life.

I vowed to take care of myself, but I could not find "that thing" that really clicked to keep me on a healthy diet. Then, around the beginning of last year, the EVE Project came into my life. It was perfect timing. The program provided the support system I needed to reach my goals. It showed me a new approach to living a healthy lifestyle and took the word "diet" out of the conversation. I began to understand that the closer the foods you select are to the earth—the sustainer of life—the more you'll begin to benefit from a more balanced mind, body and soul. It's not easy changing habits you've always had. I know from the information I am acquiring and integrating into my life through each EVE Circle I've attended, I have found "that thing" that works for me. Although I have a long way to go, my thinking is different. I'm becoming more aware of what I choose to purchase at grocery stores. I've also noticed changes in the way my clothing fits. My metabolism has increased because I exercise. I've psychologically made a commitment to become healthy and have acquired a new attitude—and it feels great! For more information: www.cvc.org



h Q&A: JOYCE ROTHERMEL



The mission of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank is both noble and necessary. It provides monthly food assistance to more than 105,000 people from 11 counties in western Pennsylvania. Included in those numbers is an average of 2,500 new households each month, with a growing number struggling to cope with recent unemployment or reduced employment. About 60 percent of the food bank's clients are families of four or more people trying to survive on less than \$2,750 a month. The remaining 40 percent live in households with a total monthly income of less than \$1,000. Despite those sobering statistics, CEO Joyce Rothermel emphasizes that helping people eat healthier is a top priority, and her organization has several programs designed to offer clients fresh food options.

Q: We usually think of food banks giving canned and processed foods to individuals needing emergency food assistance.

How is the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank helping people have access to fresh food?

A: We have always supported including more fresh food in our supply. Food banks nationwide are receiving fewer donations and have to raise funds to purchase food. The upside of this is that we can purchase healthy food, like produce. We also have specific programs that bring more fruits and vegetables to those we serve. The three largest are the Farm Stand Project, Produce to People and Gleaning. Farm stands are like farmers markets that the food bank helps establish in distressed neighborhoods where there is little access to fresh food—no markets or grocery stores—and these stands offer locally grown food whenever possible. Produce to People was created to move large quantities of time-sensitive food like produce. We load trucks on Saturday mornings and distribute in low-income neighborhoods. And our Gleaning coordinator organizes volunteers to pick farm crops in the region after the farmers are finished harvesting.

Q: How have your clients responded to the efforts to encourage them to eat more fresh food?

A: Produce is the main variety of food we have increased. We also try to provide more dairy products and meat. The amount of meat we are able to distribute has increased greatly due to the generosity of some food supply partners, including Giant Eagle, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, which started donating more meat last year. Produce to People regularly attracts 500 to 700 families to each distribution. Sometimes, education is needed to introduce people to an unusual product, but most have responded favorably to the increase in the availability of fresh food.

Q: What are the programs that the food bank offers to encourage its clients to prepare meals using fresh food?

A: The food bank's nutrition staff offers healthy recipes using fresh produce that we provide. They conduct cooking demonstrations at farm stands and pantries, and distribute a newsletter that includes recipes and other nutrition information. Our farm stands accept Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons and food stamps through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Q: What healthy eating recommendations do you have for low-income families?

A: People who struggle to feed their families healthy food should take advantage of all available resources. If they qualify for food stamps or assistance from a food pantry, they should enroll in these programs. Not only do our farm stands accept food stamps, but most farmer's markets in the region offer fresh, locally grown food at very reasonable prices.

Q: When did you begin to include and/or promote fresh food as part of your offerings, and what changes, if any, did you make to do that?

A: Our strategic plan included setting goals for the percentage of healthy food we distribute. We have met our goal of having at least 75 percent of the food we distribute meet our ranking for healthy food, and adding more produce to our inventory has been responsible for much of this progress. Having more perishable, food-like produce necessitated increasing our refrigerated space, and helping our agencies increase theirs. And Produce to People provided one answer to moving more perishable food more quickly to more accessible central locations.

To get involved: www.pittsburghfoodbank.org

On a Claire Day



50

THE PERCENTAGE
OF ALL FOOD STAMP
RECIPIENTS
NATIONWIDE WHO
ARE CHILDREN

1 OUT OF 8

THE NUMBER OF
AMERICANS WHO
RECEIVED SOME KIND
OF EMERGENCY
FOOD ASSISTANCE
DURING 2009

1,000,000

THE NUMBER OF
CHILDREN IN AMERICA
WHO GO TO BED HUNGRY
EVERY NIGHT



Gail Manier Photography

SAVORY AND SUSTAINABLE

First Person: LaKeisha Wolf, entrepreneur, founding member of Ujamaa Collective

With increasing emphasis on sustainability in our communities through green jobs and energy efficiency, members of the Ujamaa Collective believe it is important to discuss a holistic approach to sustaining the people who live in African American neighborhoods. This, in part, happens through access to affordable, fresh and healthy food, and Ujamaa is working to create a new standard. We are developing a sustainable business-preparation-and-marketplace establishment in Pittsburgh's historic Hill District, and we know that we must literally satisfy the tastes of our neighbors.

Currently, fresh food is hard to come by in the Hill. And proper nutrition is the best prevention for some of African Americans' most

pressing health issues—from diabetes to infant mortality. Our folks hear what the doctors say about changing our eating habits, but often these practices are hard to break, particularly if the “food culture” has been affected by negative events or circumstances of the past.

As a group primarily consisting of artisans, Ujamaa's strategy for meeting the needs of our neighbors is based on relationships, the food itself and the aesthetics of how we bring the two together. We have three uniquely dynamic caterers, like Kahila Miller, shown above, who all cook with taste and wellness in mind. Their specialties represent an amalgamation of vegan dishes and desserts, traditional Caribbean meals with vegetarian options like jerk tofu instead of chicken, and healthier varieties of soul food. Ujamaa offers freshly made beverages like ginger beer and sorrel, a sweet red juice made with dried Jamaican tropical

flowers. All three caterers also are certified food educators through the award-winning Food is Elementary curriculum, which is designed to help combat childhood obesity.

Our outreach events in the Hill enable us to offer taste-testing and cooking demonstrations. Through the talents of other members in master gardening and composting, Ujamaa supplies a powerhouse of resources, from the earth to the table. Forming partnerships with Hill residents to learn the language of the land together is a principal step. That's why when the food produced through these relationships enters the Ujamaa Marketplace, our intergenerational space provides a new culture of commerce and beneficial exchange, and the tastes of our community will surely be transformed.

fact

27 PERCENT OF FOOD AVAILABLE
FOR CONSUMPTION IS WASTED EVERY DAY —
ABOUT ONE POUND OF FOOD
PER DAY FOR EVERY AMERICAN

U.S. Department of Agriculture

GLEANNING Farmers often find themselves with a surplus of unmarketable produce. The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank staff recruits, trains and supervises volunteers who glean, or harvest, these leftover fruits and vegetables. Gleaning volunteers experience working on farms in southwestern Pennsylvania while partnering with farmers to help feed hungry people. The produce is taken back to the food bank and distributed to member agencies. Food bank staff also picks up produce directly from farmers. *To volunteer: www.pittsburghfoodbank.org or 412-460-3663, ext 301.*



Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

You don't have to cook
fancy or complicated
masterpieces—just good
food from fresh ingredients.

JULIA CHILD
INTERNATIONALLY CELEBRATED CHEF,
AUTHOR & TELEVISION PERSONALITY

1912–2004



FARM STAND PROJECT

The Farm Stand Project of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank provides fresh, affordable Pennsylvania-grown produce to residents of low-income neighborhoods who have limited or no access to farmers markets and grocery stores. Farm stands are open between June 9 and Nov. 11. All accept cash and welcome participants in the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC); the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP); and the Electronic Benefit Transfer/ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (EBT/SNAP).

Addison Terrace Farm Stand
Addison Terrace Community Center
2136 Elmore Sq.
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Thursdays, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

Lawrenceville Farm Stand
Stephen Foster Community Center
286 Main St.
Lawrenceville, PA 15201
Thursdays, 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Carnegie Farm Stand
Salvation Army
505 Washington Ave.
Carnegie, PA 15106
Thursdays, 12:30–6 p.m.

Millvale Borough Farm Stand
National City Bank rear parking lot
400 Grant Ave.
Millvale, PA 15209
Wednesdays, 2:30–6 p.m.

Charles Street Farm Stand
Fowler Park
2801 N. Charles St.,
North Side
Pittsburgh, PA 15214
Thursdays, 2–6 p.m.

Mon Yough Community Services Farm Stand
500 Market St., corner of
Market Street & Fifth Avenue
McKeesport, PA 15132
Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

Clairton Farm Stand
Lifespan Senior Center
530 Miller Ave.
Clairton, PA 15025
Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.–
1:30 p.m.

Seton Brookline Farm Stand
Elizabeth Seton Center parking lot
1900 Pioneer Ave.
Brookline, PA 15226
Wednesdays, 10:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

Hazelwood YMCA Farm Stand
Dairy Mart parking lot
4915 Second Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15207
Thursdays, 11 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Turtle Creek Valley Farm Stand
In front of the Westinghouse Valley
Human Services Center building
519 Penn Ave.
Turtle Creek, PA 15145
Wednesdays, Noon–3 p.m.

Hill House Farm Stand
Next to main entrance
1835 Centre Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Thursdays 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Warrington Avenue Farm Stand
Warrington Avenue &
Walter Street parking lot
Pittsburgh, PA 15210
Thursdays, 3–7 p.m.

Homewood-Brushston Farm Stand
Homewood-Brushston YMCA
Kelly Street parking lot
7140 Bennett St.
Homewood, PA 15208
Thursdays, 12:30–6:30 p.m.

*For more information on the
Farm Stand Project, please call
412-460-3663, ext. 216.*



WILL, POWER For the past 17 years, former professional basketball player Will Allen, shown above tending greens, has been teaching young and old, farmers and urban planners, about sustainable practices for supplying fresh food to local communities. His organization, Growing Power, is an internationally recognized model for food production, distribution and education. It attracts thousands of visitors every year, like the little girl, below left, who is charmed by the strutting chickens, and the group, above left, taking an Earth Day tour led by guide Alex Hipp.

Allen's extraordinarily successful new career also took him full circle to his childhood roots of growing up on a farm in Maryland. Growing Power evolved, almost fittingly, from a simple Milwaukee garden center he purchased in 1993 to sell produce from the Wisconsin farm he bought from his wife's parents. Young people from the city's largest public housing community began asking him for advice about growing their own vegetables. Allen designed a program that gave teens the opportunity to work at the center and renovate its greenhouses to grow food for their neighborhood. The partnership grew into a nonprofit that has been described as a "living museum" or "idea factory" for cultivating youth and community leadership, as well as for promoting sustainable methods of providing safe, healthy, affordable and high-quality food for communities of all types.

Today, Growing Power has farms at its Milwaukee headquarters; in Chicago, where it also has an office; and in various urban and rural locations in Wisconsin and Illinois. It has satellite training sites in Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts and Mississippi. And Allen, the organization's CEO, is a popular speaker and instructor who has won numerous awards. In 2008, he was the recipient of the prestigious John D. and Katherine T. MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant" and was named a MacArthur Fellow. *For more information:* www.growingpower.org