Two internationally-renowned food system experts lectured at Wayne State University this Fall. Both spoke about processes and tools with which to build sustainable, community food systems.

**Will Allen**, founder and executive director of Growing Power and 2008 MacArthur Fellow, spoke on October 13. Starting out as the first African-American basketball player at University of Miami and with a career in professional basketball, Allen traced the journey that brought him to farming in and around Milwaukee, and on to international recognition as a community builder through food. Allen’s greatest passion is worms—earthworms that create healthy soil that is, in turn, key to growing healthy food. As Allen says, “Worms are my livestock. They produce black gold.”

Allen’s organization, Growing Power, models a sustainable food system. It integrates worm-composting, the production of vegetables and herbs, and tilapia fish and soft shelled crabs in six greenhouses and several hoop-houses on two acres in inner-city Milwaukee. Allen and his employees and volunteers also rear chicken, goats, and bees on the property.

Growing Power also sponsors activities in Chicago, including a successful garden in the low-income Cabrini Green neighborhood and another near the ritzy Golden Mile of Michigan Avenue, south of Millenium Park.

Growing Power has formulated a “market basket” concept in which low-income urban residents can purchase a weekly basket of healthy and fresh food for a modest $15 price tag. The basket is supplied by Growing Power and farmers from the Rainbow Farmer’s Cooperative, with which Allen works closely.

Allen also offers workshops on basic and advanced agricultural techniques at his Milwaukee site. Participants, including hundreds of youth, have come from across North America to these trainings, This “food tourism” has earned Growing Power recognition from the city of Milwaukee for its contribution to the area’s economic development.

Will Allen and his daughter, Erika, are also co-founders of the Growing Food and Justice for all Initiative, whose goal is to dismantle racism in the food system. GFJI’s first national conference in September engaged several hundred food activists of diverse backgrounds in exciting activities and conversations.

**Wayne Roberts**, coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council and author of several books on sustainable food systems, spoke at Wayne State on November 20. His lecture described the many and diverse “side” benefits of community-based activities to increase the availability of healthy foods, so much so that healthy food “is just the icing on the cake.”

Benefits include greater social bonding through neighborhood gardens, reduced rainwater runoffs and conservation of energy through rooftop gardens, and more efficient use of neighborhood resources such as swimming pools that double up as fishing ponds for disabled youth who cannot participate in outdoor activities.

Roberts spoke of food’s power to create bonds among groups and bridge across groups, as happens, for example, in urban community gardens or neighborhood food celebrations. These experiences bring people together, reinforce relationships, and provide openings for dialogue.

Detroit will soon have a food policy council. Roberts gave future council members valuable advice: Focus on programs, not just policy; recruit members who will do the work of the council; and create a process around shared values and goals rather than one in which members represent stakeholder groups that have to vet the council’s decisions.

The lectures were co-sponsored by SEED Wayne and community partners. For details, browse: www.clas.wayne.edu/seedwayne
Ford Motor Company Fund Awards Made on World Food Day

WSU’s President Jay Noren accepts check for SEED Wayne

On October 16, World Food Day, Wayne State University hosted a gathering of more than 60 university and community members to celebrate the public announcement of Ford Motor Company Fund’s College Community Challenge award to SEED Wayne. President Jay Noren accepted the award on behalf of SEED Wayne.

The event, emceed by CLAS Dean Robert Thomas, featured remarks by Ford Motor Company Fund President Jim Vella, Dr. Noren, SEED Wayne’s Kami Pothukuchi, and Patrick Crouch of Earthworks Urban Farm (a SEED Wayne community partner).

All discussed the importance of community initiatives to end hunger and build sustainable food systems, and Wayne State’s partnership in these efforts. Dr. Noren drew from his past experience at agricultural schools to enumerate the benefits from programs such as farm-to-school and urban agriculture. SEED Wayne has a farm-to-cafeteria program which seeks to connect food providers at Wayne State with local producers.

Mr. Vella’s remarks were especially poignant as he placed the awards to SEED Wayne and other community organizations in the context of the economic woes that auto manufacturers are experiencing today. “People ask us why we’re giving away money when times are so hard for us,” he said. “I would argue that our responsibility to the community increases when we’re facing hard times, because community needs are so much greater at such times,” he added.

After the event, SEED Wayne’s Will Ahee and Kevin Griffin gave interested attendees a tour of the Warrior Demonstration Garden. SEED Wayne looks forward to partnering with organizations recognized at the event, including Gleaners Food Bank, Focus Hope, and Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Harvest Dinner Celebrates Partners, Youth

On September 25, SEED Wayne hosted its first annual harvest dinner at the McGregor Memorial Conference Center. Eighty guests, including 25 youth helped us celebrate the year’s harvests in food and relationships.

The evening began with a tour of the Warrior Demonstration Garden, McGregor Center’s compost tumbler, and the Mort Harris Recreation Center. The garden impressed one young person, who was overheard saying, “I did not know Wayne State was so cool!” Two adults also decided to purchase or build compost tumbler for their facilities after seeing ours.

Guests included representatives from SEED Wayne’s partners in the community and the university, and children from Growing Healthy Kids (a project of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen), and children’s relatives. GHK teaches young people to grow vegetables and prepare nutritious meals. This was some guests’ first visit to Wayne State.

Dinner was a delicious spread prepared by SEED Wayne partner, AVI Foodsystems, with salad, pasta, risotto, and apple pie cake. SEED Wayne’s Kami Pothukuchi thanked community and university partners for their support of SEED Wayne.

SEED Wayne Partners

The Eastern Market Corporation
Vermicompost Workshop First of Proposed Series

Worms will soon eat our garbage! Fifteen students gathered on November 14, to learn how to create worm bins which will help "recycle" nutrients from food scraps that can be returned to the soil.

The workshop, led by WSU student Julia Sosin, was the first in a proposed series of monthly workshops to be offered by SEED Wayne to interested university and community members. The hands-on lesson demonstrated how to start and maintain a worm bin. At the end, participants expressed excitement about creating their own bins with resources provided by SEED Wayne.

A second workshop on preparing healthy meals using local and seasonal foods, is planned for January 2009. Future workshops will explore other themes of interest to SEED Wayne members, themes that are consistent with the program’s mission and goals. Suggested topics include gardening techniques such as lasagna gardening, season extension, building rain barrels, and more.

In addition to encouraging the sharing of knowledge and experience on specific topics, the workshops will also help create a community at Wayne State around sustainable food issues, and build related student leadership. This is because several SEED Wayne student members are avid gardeners and cooks, and workshops will tap into their skills and experiences as much as possible.

Stay tuned for a schedule of workshops for Winter 2009.

Garden “Put to Bed” for the Winter

Enjoying a rare 70°F day in November, volunteers led by SEED Wayne’s Will Ahee, took down the Warrior Demonstration Garden on the evening of November 5.

The group planted garlic in one bed, which will be harvested next Summer. They moved quickly, clearing most of the beds and prepping the soil for cover crops, all in just over two hours. The cabbages and cauliflowers were left alone as they can tolerate the cold and will deliver good-size heads in a few weeks. The cover crops, which are resistant to cold weather, should grow through the winter and enrich the soil as they do. These crops will be incorporated into the soil, before next season’s planting to increase the organic matter in the soil. Volunteers celebrated their work with some snacks purchased from Avalon bakery (a SEED Wayne partner).

SEED Wayne hopes to add one or more gardens on campus next year. Readers should contact Will Ahee at w.ahee@wayne.edu to recommend additional sites or if they would like to sponsor a garden.

Do you have suggestions a future workshop, or are you interested in offering a workshop? Please contact SEED Wayne’s Will Ahee at w.ahee@wayne.edu.

We encourage readers to attend similar workshops offered in Detroit by the Garden Resource Program (GRP). To learn more, contact Lindsay Turpin, GRP coordinator at 313-365-1568.

Mark Your Calendars and Spread the Word

Vegetarian Indian Meal:
Every Friday, Student Center
The Mantra Yoga Club provides an Indian vegetarian meal for a suggested $4 donation every Friday at the Student Center. To reserve a space, contact mantrayoga@wayne.edu.
For more information, browse: www.mantrayoga.followinginthefootsteps.com

January
TBD (browse www.clas.wayne.edu/seedwayne for more information): Cooking locally, seasonally, and healthfully: A cooking demonstration
3rd Wednesday of every month, 7 PM, Eastern Market, Shed 5: Detroit Abides Movie Night; Free Movie Showing on an issue of relevance to the food and environmental movement in Detroit.

February
Feb 12, 6 PM, Capuchin Soup Kitchen Dining Room: Community Forum– Healthy Corner Stores.

For information on Garden Resource Program workshops which will be offered in 2009, visit www.detroitagriculture.com
Forgotten Harvest: Rescuing Food to End Hunger

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly half of all children in Detroit live in poverty, placing them at severe risk of hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, large quantities of edible food are thrown away every year by the area’s grocery stores and eating places. Nationally, about 25 percent of all food produced ends up in landfills. Many food rescue organizations have come into being to collect and distribute these food “wastes” to pantries and soup kitchens that, in turn, supply households in need of food.

Connecting food businesses in and around Wayne State University with Forgotten Harvest, a food rescue organization in the Detroit area, is an important SEED Wayne activity.

Forgotten Harvest is a SEED Wayne partner. The organization’s mission is to relieve hunger in the Detroit area by rescuing prepared and perishable food and donating it to food assistance programs.

It sends refrigerated trucks to pick up edible food from more than 375 participating grocery stores, restaurants, and catering businesses, which then deliver this food to 147 food assistance agencies in the area. Last year, Forgotten Harvest distributed 9.5 million pounds of food.

SEED Wayne’s Will Ahee has contacted several local businesses both, to inform them about opportunities related to food rescue and composting, and to recruit their participation. Three businesses expressed interest in donating food on a regular basis or from occasional catering events. We have connected them to Forgotten Harvest.

Businesses gain many benefits from their food donations. These include tax write-offs, reduced waste disposal costs, and positive community publicity and increased staff morale arising from their contributions, and of course, the satisfaction that comes from knowing that area households in need of food have received help.

Forgotten Harvest regularly depends on volunteers for its work. Many volunteers ride with truck drivers for a day on their route, helping them along the way and getting to know the organization better. Special volunteer events are organized around major holidays.

Forgotten Harvest’s executive director Susan Goodell is also a co-chair of the Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative, a group that has come together to develop plans for increasing Detroiters’ access to healthy foods and resources for physical activity.

We urge readers to become involved with and give to food assistance organizations in the area. These include Forgotten Harvest (www.forgottenharvest.org); Gleaners Community Food Bank (http://www.gcfb.org); Focus Hope (http://www.focushope.edu); and the Capuchin Soup Kitchen (www.cskdetroit.org).