



New Roots for Agriculture Education

Milwaukee Vincent High School launches urban ag program | Jennifer Zahn



Shamika Suggs said she never used to like science. But now, the 16-year-old Milwaukee student aspires to become a veterinarian. “In regular science, we’re reading out of a book, writing notes,” Suggs said. “Now, we’re doing science ourselves — actual experiments.”

Suggs is a member of the inaugural class of a new urban agricultural sciences program at Harold S. Vincent High School — the largest school program of its kind in Wisconsin, and the only one in Milwaukee.

Agriculture programs are making a comeback in Wisconsin schools as educators tap into such expanding career fields as renewable energy. In the past three years, eight school districts have added agricultural science programs with a licensed teacher and their own Future Farmers of America charters, according to Jeff Hicken, agriculture and natural resources education consultant for the Department of Public Instruction.

Vincent’s program features aspects of the growing urban farming movement, including outdoor beehives, greenhouses and an aquaponics room.

“If there’s one thing I want people to take away, it’s that it’s not cows and sows and plows,” said

Kyle Slick, Vincent’s new agricultural sciences teacher. The program has 216 students in its first year and will offer courses in introduction to urban agriculture, biotechnology, biofuels, veterinary science, landscape design and urban gardening.

“What I want my students to do is to have postsecondary aspirations,” Slick said. “By the time they’re seniors, I want them to have specific ideas of what careers they want and how to get to those careers.”

Vincent, set on a 90-acre plot of land on Milwaukee’s northwest side, was built in the 1970s with a focus on agriculture. Slick, a first-year teacher, is the first agricultural instructor Milwaukee Public Schools has hired in more than three decades to help get Vincent back to its roots with a modern focus.

Slick said he hopes to expand the program by adding one discipline each year to its lineup of mini-enterprises — plants, food science, animal production.





URBAN AGRICULTURE IN ACTION at Convention

A special School Tour of Milwaukee Vincent High School's Urban Agriculture Program and Growing Power, an urban greenhouse and farm in Milwaukee, will be held in conjunction with the 92nd State Education Convention.

On the morning of **Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013** school leaders will have the opportunity to visit Milwaukee Vincent High School and see first-hand the projects and advanced agriculture growing techniques students are learning in class. The tour will also include a trip to Growing Power, a nationally renowned urban farm and greenhouse established by Milwaukee's Will Allen (*see top of next page*).

Pre-registration is required. If interested, make sure to check the school tours box on the State Education Convention registration form.

For more information, visit wasb.org/convention.

"We want this to be the focus of the school — the agricultural high school of Milwaukee," Slick said.

Outside Support

Community support is nurturing the Vincent program. Urban farming pioneers Growing Power and Sweet Water Organics are partners in the program, and city funding helped get it off the ground. Mayor Tom Barrett and representatives of FaB Milwaukee, a regional network for the food and beverage industry, spoke at the program's open house.

Barrett connected the program at Vincent to a city initiative to convert foreclosed lots into garden plots for urban farming.

"If we can find a way as a community to scale this up and make it financially feasible, we've hit a grand slam," Barrett said.

Other partners, including Milwaukee Area Technical College, the

MEET THE PRESENTER: Will Allen

WASB Breakfast Program Keynote Speaker
Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013 | State Education Convention

Will Allen, an urban agriculture leader and founder and CEO of Growing Power, Inc., will be the featured speaker at the WASB Breakfast, **Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013** as part of the State Education Convention.

Allen, son of a sharecropper, is a former professional basketball player, ex-corporate sales leader and now a farmer. He has become recognized as among the preeminent thinkers of our time on agriculture and food policy.

As founder of Growing Power Inc., a farm and community food center in Milwaukee, Will is widely considered the leading authority in the expanding field of urban agriculture. Using methods he has developed over a lifetime, Will trains community members to become community farmers, assuring them a secure source of good food without regard to political or economic forces.

Will's accolades include being named a John D. and Katherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellow – only the second farmer ever to be so honored. In February 2010, he was invited to the White House to join First Lady Michelle Obama in launching her “Let’s Move!” program. In May 2010, *Time* magazine named Will to the *Time 100 World’s Most Influential People*.

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University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-River Falls, aim to streamline the transition from high school to college for agricultural sciences students at Vincent by offering more programs directly linked to the disciplines students are learning.

“Our goal is to button this up so we have a food chain from Vincent to MATC to UWM,” MATC President Michael Burke said. “We want to create pathways to local universities, like UWM’s school of public health.”

Hicken, of the DPI, said the growth of ag programs around the state is market driven. In addition to new programs in Wisconsin schools, Hicken said, 40 existing programs have expanded.

“A lot of what has been driving this lately are the job markets out there,” Hicken said.

About 354,000 jobs in Wisconsin — 10 percent of the workforce — come from its \$59 billion-dollar agriculture industry, according to a study by the University of Wisconsin Extension.

Paul Larsen, chair of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council, has taught agricultural education at Freedom High School in the Freedom Area School District for the past 26 years. His classroom helped serve as a model for the recent developments at Vincent — a step in the right direction, according to Larsen.

“We try to get students aware and excited about these careers in agriculture, because we’re going to need them very soon,” he said. ■

Zahn is an interim reporter with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

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