

Inside the White House: The Kitchen Garden

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MRS. OBAMA: The garden was something that I had always thought about. I was probably like most busy mothers who were, you know, a busy working family and I would find it difficult to feed my family in a healthy way quickly.

So I decided to change our diet, and this happened throughout the course of the campaign, and it was really simple things: Adding more fruits and vegetables, trying to sit down as a family and prepare a meal a couple of times a week. Eating out a little bit less, eliminating processed and sugary foods as much as possible.

And I saw some really immediate results with just those minor changes. And I thought, well, if I could help other families kind of learn these small changes in my role as First Lady, that would be a good thing.

SAM KASS [White House Chef]: Today we are amending our soil and we've gotten our soil tested, it's actually in really good shape, so what we're going to do is add a few amendments to increase the fertility of the soil to sort of provide a lot of stability for the soil and bring it into balance, basically setting the foundation that we'll build on for years to come.

We're doing our first till. We're churning over the soil about, we're going down about six to eight inches deep, and then we're going to spread some amendments. We're going to use some sulfate to potash which is basically to add some sulfur.

We have crab meal which is going to add our calcium and nitrogen to that food critical and our crabs are sourced from the Chesapeake so we're all keeping it in the region.

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT: Guess what that means: no work, no spuds; no work, no turnips; no tanks, no Flying Fortress, no victory. Bear that in mind, all you victory gardeners, and work for victory.

SAM KASS: This is the first vegetable garden since Eleanor Roosevelt's victory garden in World War II. When we looked back at the records it was, they actually had a really tough time getting it established, and in the end it was plot, you know, probably about the size of one bed that we have here that one of the daughters of somebody who worked here tended to. So as a sort of really productive, you know, feeding a lot of people garden, this is the first one in well over a hundred years.

The seeds that we're using from Monticello that Thomas Jefferson had passed down were given to us by Peter Hatch, who is the head gardener at Monticello. Thomas Jefferson more than any one man changed the way we eat in this country and in the way we grow food. When his ambassadors would go out all over the world he would ask them to bring back seeds, and he's the first person to start seasonal growing.

That is something that people are really sort of coming back to now and thinking about ways to, you know, use a diversity of crops and keep going throughout the year.

MRS. OBAMA: People were uniformly excited about trying to make this happen. Today is getting the soil ready, and we'll come back in a couple of weeks to actually do the planting, and then sometime in June, right, right around the time that school is over, hopefully we'll have lots of great vegetables and fruits. We'll harvest them, and then we'll bring you guys into the kitchen in the White House.

SAM KASS: The kids from Bancroft who have helped us plant the garden have just been absolutely phenomenal.

MRS. OBAMA: Hey, look, Sam, there's a carrot!

SAM KASS: They came and gave these talks about what they've learned. It was just mind blowing. Kids talked about, one kid talked about how she now eats all of her fruits and, all of her vegetables at dinner and her mom is noticing a difference, but that her favorite vegetable is carrots, and just like people, I quote, carrots have a history. The kids took this to a level that I could never have even imagined. They've just been tremendous.

MRS. OBAMA: We wanted the focus to be on kids because you can affect children's behavior so much more easily than you can adults, and I saw that in my own life. My kids, you know, jumped on the new routine and didn't miss a beat, and they began to monitor our behavior more so than I was monitoring theirs.

And also I want to encourage people to think about doing more family meals. We've found that we've been able to do that and, you know, part of the message is if the President of the United States can sit down with his family and have dinner, hopefully more families find the time to do the same thing.

[FEMALE SPEAKER]: Here. Smell this. Peppery.

SAM KASS: So far it's been incredible. We've produced over 200 pounds of food already, going on 210, and, you know, it's not even July yet. So it's pretty, we're doing pretty well.

Our first major dinner was a small dinner of like 20 of the sort of nation's top economic advisors and thinkers, and we did, the whole first salad was completely out of the garden.

MRS. OBAMA: I don't think about this with my kids in terms of what I want them to be today, I'm thinking about who I want them to be when they go to college and when they raise their own kids. How will they make choices about what they eat when they're away from me. What will be the messages that are in their head as they think about, you know, whether they're going to drink the soda or whether they're going to have glass of water. How will they engage their own

children in these messages early on so that these become habits that are just a part of life and not something that you have to change in midstream.

So the garden is really an important introduction to what I hope will be a new way that our country thinks about food. So that's, you know, that's the story of the garden, and it's been quite an amazing success, if I do say so myself.

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