



NEWS STAFF/TAMIKA MOORE

Casey Gustowarow, left, and Daniel Bowman Simon are driving around the country in an eye-catching bus, gathering signatures on a petition calling for the next president to plant an organic farm on the White House grounds.

Cross-country ride urges White House to add organic farm

Gustowarow stands atop the White House Organic Farm Project bus, where he and his Peace Corps compatriot have planted an organic garden.



By THOMAS SPENCER
News staff writer

Two former Peace Corps volunteers steered an odd yellow school bus topped with an organic garden into Birmingham Monday as part of a cross-country trip to encourage the next president to turn the White House lawn into an urban farm.

Daniel Bowman Simon, 28, was inspired to embark on the journey after hearing a speech from San Francisco restaurateur and sustainable farming advocate Alice Waters in which she described her vision for a food garden at every school and at the White House.

Simon recruited his Peace Corps compatriot Casey Gustowarow, 27, who was working on a Maryland farm, and procured an attention-getting bus — essentially two buses welded together, top-to-top — and outfitted it with a rooftop garden and retractable window boxes.

The eye-catching bus starts conversations, Simon said, allowing the two to spread their message and gather petitions urging the next president to find space on the White House's 17 acres for a farm that will be "a model for healthy, economical and sustainable living everywhere."

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FARM: A victory garden for a new age

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"The president should lead by example," Simon said.

They've traveled from New York to San Francisco and are ultimately headed to Washington, D.C. They were in New Orleans over the weekend and headed for Atlanta today. While in Birmingham, they stopped at Jones Valley Urban Farm, the education and production farm in the Park Place neighborhood downtown, and lunched at Frank Stitt's Bottega Cafe.

Using the White House grounds to produce food is not a new idea. Eleanor Roosevelt planted a Victory Garden during World War II to encourage Americans to increase food production. According to supporters, the proposed garden would encourage self-reliance and the consumption of fresh, nutritious, locally grown food, cultivated in a way that doesn't harm the environment. Simon said they've contacted both presidential campaigns, but he accepts that both are too busy campaigning now to think about re-landscaping the White House.

But when one of them is elected, the plan and petitions — gathered along the way and over the Internet at www.thewhofarm.org — will be ready. The effort is non-partisan, Simon said. "We will work with any administration."

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