



## For the Love of Ancestral Cuisine

*Nu'u Yavi, a Mixtec word that means "plaza"*



*Photo: Tudor Stanley*

### Who We Are

The Pan Valley Institute (PVI) is an immigrant-led popular education organization based in Fresno, California. It supports women, youth, and indigenous populations and expands its cross-generational work to other counties in the San Joaquin Valley, including Tulare, Merced, and Madera.

We foster active citizenship and offer inter-generational learning spaces for immigrants and refugees to realize their abilities to become social actors of change, learn from one another, develop a sense of belonging, reclaim their cultural rights, and prepare for building caring and culturally thriving communities. Our work is guided by popular education, cultural exchange, participatory action research, and decolonial pedagogy principles.

### The History of the Nu'u Yavi Project

PVI has undertaken a unique new project to support a group of Indigenous women as they endeavor to create their own Oaxacan Nu'u Yavi marketplace and plaza in Madera. The area is home to diverse Indigenous groups from the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. A Nu'u Yavi is a

vibrant public space that celebrates Mexican indigenous heritage.

The inaugural Nu'u Yavi occurred in May 2024, with participants recreating a Oaxacan plaza at Madera Courthouse Park. Coordinated by Rosa Hernandez, one of PVI's cultural organizers, seven Indigenous women and their families prepared and served homemade Mexican food from the Mixteca region reminiscent of their homeland. Each group contributed their own rich culinary traditions and indigenous knowledge of food systems.

The event enjoyed overwhelming success, sparking the desire for participants to continue offering their food, art, and cultural activities in Madera.

### The Vision for Moving Nu'u Yavi Forward

The primary purpose of the Nu'u Yavi project is to honor the traditional indigenous immigrant women who are building culturally thriving communities in Madera, a city they have adopted as their home. This effort is crucial for preserving these women's unique food heritage and ensuring it is passed down to future generations.

[Learn more at PanValleyInstitute.org.](https://PanValleyInstitute.org)

Traditional cooks play a vital role in maintaining and preserving ancestral food practices, and their expertise ensures that traditional recipes and cooking techniques are safeguarded and shared with younger generations, helping to maintain cultural identity and strengthen community bonds.

Additionally, we see Nu'u Yavi as an opportunity for the participants to create economic security for their families by creating a regular income stream they can rely on.

PVI's goal is to create a monthly Nu'U Yavi outdoor marketplace in Madera where participants can earn an income selling their traditional foods, share their culinary heritage, and connect with a broader audience.

A secondary goal is to open a community kitchen where the women can prepare their food following city protocols in a commercially approved space. This space will allow not only for cooking, but will provide a place where the women and their families can learn from each other and practice their traditional mutual aid.

They will learn and share innovative foodways that will add value while preserving authenticity. Traditional cooks need opportunities to share their expertise with the public. By creating platforms for them to expose their knowledge, we can foster greater appreciation and understanding of indigenous culinary traditions, enriching the cultural fabric of Madera.

As part of an economic justice goal, PVI will support these women for at least a year until they have the infrastructure in place to operate independently.



### The Goals of Nu'u Yavi are to:

**Recognize and honor** the traditional indigenous cooks in Madera.

**Preserve and transmit** ancestral food knowledge to future generations.

**Build accessible spaces** for traditional cooks to practice and share their culinary arts.

**Create opportunities** for public engagement and education about indigenous culinary traditions.

**Increase the visibility** of traditional cooks beyond their communities. Highlighting their contributions at local, regional, and national levels can lead to greater recognition, support, and respect for their work, helping to amplify their voices and stories.

**Value and respect** the culinary knowledge and cultural contributions of indigenous peoples. The knowledge of traditional cooks is invaluable. Recognizing and celebrating this knowledge ensures it is respected and valued. Encouraging self-valuation among traditional cooks reinforces their essential role in preserving cultural heritage and inspires them to continue their practices.

**Provide economic security** for these women who possess skills to generate income and support their families. By exploring opportunities for them to sell their traditional foods, we can help improve their economic well-being and sustain their culinary practices.

### How Can You Help?

Community support is crucial to helping us make this dream a reality. We humbly ask you to partner with us to show these indigenous women making their homes among us that their contributions are honored and valued. There are numerous ways you can help sustain this project, but some of our most immediate needs are:

- Monetary donations
- Donations of ingredients needed for food preparation
- Venues to host Nu'u Yavi
- Affordable access to a commercial kitchen, ideally in Madera, where the women hope to open their own commercial kitchen eventually
- Support from local authorities to make permits more accessible and affordable
- Partnerships with organizations that can sponsor, promote, and support Nu'u Yavi events.

For more information, contact: Estela Galvan [egalvan@afsc.org](mailto:egalvan@afsc.org) (English) or Rosa Hernandez [colectivosaboramitierra@gmail.com](mailto:colectivosaboramitierra@gmail.com) (Spanish).