

# Planting seeds for careers through urban farming



## BACKGROUND

This case study spotlights how the Yosemite Village (Yo'Ville) Community Garden and Urban Farm Incubator is utilizing TCC funding to not only improve access to healthy food and green space, but also support Fresnoans with fulfilling job opportunities and catalyzing farming experience. Learn more about the community garden and Transform Fresno's other Urban and Community Forestry projects on page 79.

*Interviews for this story were conducted in April and June 2021.*

Member of the Yo'Ville Community Garden waters corn and flowers in 2020. Photo credit: Chris De León, Fresno Metro Ministry

**CHRIS DE LEÓN** is the Community Garden Manager and a staff member at Fresno Metro Ministry, the lead project partner at the Yo'Ville Community Garden. He moved to Fresno at four years old, and his love for the city runs deep. But he also recognizes the health disparities stemming from the lack of access to healthy food and healthy green spaces, and a concentration of environmental pollution in Southwest Fresno.

De León has wanted to start a community garden since high school, and he tried but couldn't obtain funding. "I didn't know how to write a grant, and our school didn't have a lot of funding for it. Now it's exciting that I get to do that as an adult... just a couple blocks down from where I wanted to do it before." When the Fresno Metro Ministry was hiring for two part-time positions for the garden, De León jumped at the opportunity. But he needed full-time work, so he asked for it — and Fresno Metro Ministry obliged, enabling De León to fulfill a longtime dream while making ends meet.

In his role, De León has developed new skills for growing food, including knowledge of permaculture. "[I've learned] to design a local food system that engages and benefits residents and doesn't deplete the soil and focuses on community care." He also learned about the logistics of building a larger-scale site than he had worked with previously, including navigating city code, hiring contractors, and working with site plans.

**"I've been wanting to work on this project for so long, and now I have a full-time job that allows me to do just that."**

CHRIS DE LEÓN



**Chris De León at the Yosemite Village Permaculture Community Garden & Urban Farm Incubator.**

Photo credit: Jesse Martindale, Fresno Metro Ministry

De León says that the most rewarding part of working in the garden is that it brings the community together. When COVID hit, he says, "we saw a surge in residents applying to the garden because more people wanted a place to be outside of their homes. I think the garden helped a lot of the residents to have somewhere safe to be together."

The garden has generated community-wide benefits that specifically address food insecurity. "The Yo'Ville Community Garden is creating a local food system," De León explains. "Fresno residents can buy fresh produce that's organically grown on site. They can meet the farmer growing the food, see the practices they're utilizing," he stated. "The garden provides much needed green space and space for residents to grow their own food and learn how to start a small-scale urban growing operation."

**MIGUEL AVENDAÑO** is one of the community members that Chris De León recruited to start a half acre urban farm at the Yo’Ville site. Avendaño has years of experience growing food. He moved to Fresno in 2003 for agricultural jobs and has worked throughout the Central Valley ever since. He appreciates the abundance of work opportunities and he, his wife, and two children have established a solid foundation in Fresno.

In 2021, Avendaño joined the Yo’Ville Urban Farm Incubator program. The farm incubator provides land, shared tools, water access, and learning opportunities for new small farmers wanting to grow in ecologically sustainable ways. Avendaño shares, “I am producing organic vegetables, using methods that won’t damage the environment and our health.”

Avendaño is now producing enough to sell and supplement his income with the produce he grows at the community farm. He partners with the other farmers from Yo’Ville Urban Farm Incubator to run a farm stand, where they sell their produce every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month. “In five to ten years, my goal is to have many acres planted, to have employees, to be growing and selling fresh, organic produce wholesale. It will give my family a more comfortable and stable life,” Avendaño says. He credits the farm incubator



**Miguel Avendaño and son at the Yo’Ville Farm Stand.**  
Photo credit: Chris De León, Fresno Metro Ministry

program with making this goal feasible, noting the ways it has already helped him progress toward it: providing a small piece of land, the materials he needs to farm, and the opportunity to learn new techniques for planting.

**“My primary goal is to grow my farm... It would not be possible to start from zero without support from the incubator.”**

MIGUEL AVENDAÑO

**PATRICIA HUBBARD** was born and raised in Riverdale, a little town just outside of Fresno, and has lived in the city itself since 1996. Solidifying her roots here, Hubbard’s three children and siblings also live in Fresno. But her feeling of connection to the place has grown since getting involved with the Yo’Ville Community Garden.

Hubbard first heard about the garden after someone knocked on her door and handed her a flier. Already familiar with gardening in her backyard, Hubbard signed on to volunteer. While she expected to help grow the garden, she has been pleasantly surprised by the relationships she’s developed. For her, the community connection is the most rewarding part of being involved with the garden. “The people that I garden with, the volunteers, staff and other gardeners, are like a family or community,” she said.

After having a successful first year with a garden plot, Hubbard expanded in her second year. She joined the Yo’Ville Urban Farm Incubator program, giving her a half acre of land to tend. She has also gained new skills and knowledge, including how to grow several new plant species. She also credits TCC’s investment in the Yo’Ville Community Garden as allowing her to learn the business and finance side of running a farm.



**Patricia Hubbard at the Yosemite Village Permaculture Community Garden and Urban Farm Incubator**  
Photo credit: Jesse Martindale, Fresno Metro Ministry

**“There’s an ongoing process of learning. For the incubator farm, they’re going to teach me how to do a business plan and apply for grants and all of that.”**

PATRICIA HUBBARD

Looking ahead, Hubbard plans to use the skills she builds through the five-year incubator farm program to farm two acres of family land in Riverdale.