



# Ka Tipu Ka Ora – A Whanganui Regenerative and Resilient Sustainable Food System

Kellogg Rural Leadership program  
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## He mihi tuatahi

Nau mai e ngā hua e hora nei I  
whakatupu-a-nuku, I whakatupu-a-rangi  
Tāwhia ki ā Rehua ki ā Tane i te ao  
mārama Ko ia i whakairia ki runga Kia tina!  
TINA! Hui e! TAIKI E

We acknowledge these fruits laid before  
us Descended from our ancestors into the  
world of light. Let it be elevated above so  
that it has certainty and is maintained.  
And so that it will be secure

*Tēna koutou e aku rangatira, ngā tauwhiro tangā o te wāhi ngaro ki ā kōutou katoa.*

*He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaupapa kai, huri noa i te motu, Ngā hāpori me ngā whānau i tuku  
mai i ngā kōrero. Tēna koutou, tēna koutou tēna koutou katoa! Ko Aotea te waka, Ko  
Ruapehu te Maunga, ko Whanganui te Awa, ko Nga Paerangi te Iwi, ko Kaiwhaiki te Marae,  
ko Te Kiritahi te Whare Tupuna, Tena tatou katoa.*

### **He korero tuarua /disclaimer**

I submit this research report with the understanding that it will be published and agree to the publication of all the korero provided in its submitted form. This research is a culmination of my 2022 learning journey during the Whanganui based Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme.

Within this korero I've attempted to incorporate the research tools and skills learnt during my journey. I've utilised the tools of critical analysis, network generation, mātauranga Māori, mātauranga Whanganui and have provided practical recommendations that may contribute towards rangatiratanga, the self determination of our Whanganui people within my research topic – A Whanganui response to regenerative and resilient sustainable food systems, in essence a response to Kai Sovereignty.

A condensed version of my korero in this report was also shared with my Kellogg colleagues and industry on this topic in the final phase of the Programme. I welcome this process with the insistence that mātauranga Māori is an important aspect to consider within the Food and Fibre industry and I hope that my research findings can ensure accessibility and uptake to a wider audience.

The most important disclaimer I want to highlight is that my research is not intended as a formal academic report. This research has been produced based on information available at the date of publication, without any independent verification. This report is not copyright, and dissemination of this research is encouraged, providing the Kellogg's programme and I am clearly acknowledged. Contact details may be obtained through the New Zealand Rural Leadership Trust for media, speaking and research purposes.

Lastly, I want to mihi to all the Strategic, Service and Program partners of the program the organisations, industry colleagues and whanau that supported my research. And Te Puni Kōkiri for sponsoring by engagement with the program.

### Strategic Partners



### Programme Partners



### Service Partners



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## 1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a Founding document

The research report is committed to being responsive to Māori as Tangata Whenua and recognises the Tiriti o Waitangi as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as articulated by the Waitangi Tribunal, and the New Zealand Courts provides a framework for how we are to fulfil our obligations under the Te Tiriti daily.

More recently as outlined by the Ministry of Health, in 2019, "The Hauora Report"<sup>1</sup> articulated five principles for primary care that are applicable to not only the wider health care system, but also to any person, organisation or Crown Agency working with Māori in our communities.

These principles are articulated as:

- **Tino Rangatiratanga:** The guarantee of tino rangatiratanga, which provides for Māori self-determination and mana Motuhake in the design, deliver and monitoring of community services.
- **Equity:** The principle of equity, which requires the Crown to commit to achieving equitable outcomes for Māori. This is achieved through breaking down barriers and enabling equity of access to ensure quality of outcomes.
- **Active protection:** The principle of active protection, which requires the Crown to act, to the fullest extent practicable to achieve equitable outcomes for Māori. This includes that it, its agents, and its Treaty partner are well informed on the extent and nature of both Māori wellbeing outcomes and efforts to achieve Māori wellbeing equity.
- **Options:** The principle of options which requires the Crown to provide for and properly resource kaupapa Māori services such as Ka Tipu Ka Ora. Also, the Crown is obliged to ensure that all services are provided in a culturally appropriate manner that recognises and supports the expression of Te Ao Māori models of service delivery.
- **Partnership:** The principle of Partnership which requires the Crown and Māori to work in partnership in the governance, design, delivery, and monitoring of community services. This includes enabling Māori to express tino rangatiratanga over participation in governance, design, delivery, and monitoring of community services.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health, 2019: The Hauora Report

For this research project and to understand the importance for Māori, it was important for me as the writer to enable the *principles* to guide my mahi.

It was also important to provide community level and grassroots level insights and intelligence to enable communities to partner on the development of services to create positive impacts for people throughout the community. These services should focus on addressing equity of access to services in a manner that is consistent with tino rangatiratanga, active protection in the co-design, provide options to ensure culturally appropriate services and developed through a solutions focussed community led partnership approach with the Treaty always at the forefront

## 2. Executive Summary

Everyone should have access to affordable, healthy food. However, across Aotearoa New Zealand a rapidly growing number of people are experiencing severe food insecurity - which means that they don't know where their next meal is coming from, or if it will be nutritious enough to lead a healthy, active life.

This research report will focus on answering the question of; How everyone, through a kaupapa Māori lens can move toward Sustainable Food Systems which are regenerative and resilient; prioritise locally grown and affordable kai; and uphold mātauranga (indigenous knowledge), kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and rangatiratanga (leadership) within this system.

This research also aims to help develop and establish sustainable local food systems, so all individuals and whānau have access to good food to improve community health and wellbeing; where “sustainable local food system” is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to enhance the environmental, economic, and social health of a place, ensuring food security and nutrition.

This research supports the vision that everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand should be able to access good food at all times; where “good food” is food and beverages that are affordable, nourishing, appetising, sustainable, locally produced and culturally appropriate.

## 3. Key Findings

- Kai (food) is all about whakapapa (genealogy). It is the great connector that joins us to our tupuna (ancestors), our mokopuna (descendants), our whānau (families), te taiao (environment), and each other. Through kai we are connected to the plants, the animals, the waterways, the oceans, the forests, and the atua (deities). The recipes of our ancestors get pulled out in modern kitchens, linking us across time and bringing us together around the table to love and learn.

- Kai is central to Māori concepts of wellness and for generations it has brought whānau, hapū and iwi together. Kai is medicinal. When it is nutritionally dense and healthy, it feeds and heals our body and mind. When it is grown by our people, in our place, it feeds and heals our spirit. When it is prepared and eaten together, full of love, it feeds and heals our families and communities.
- Kai is the glue that holds so many of our communities together, and it is the sustenance that keeps our people well in body, mind, and spirit. However, for most people today our food system is not medicinal. Our current food system negatively affects our physical wellbeing, mental health, and community resilience. At the same time, the food system is causing environmental damage and degrading mana atua (spiritual integrity)<sup>2</sup>.
- Māori have solutions to regenerative and resilient food systems based on Mātauranga Māori.
- Many suburbs in Whanganui are food swamps and/or food deserts. This means residents and their population have good access to bad food and bad access to good food.
- Individuals and whānau in Whanganui are suffering from diet-related chronic diseases.
- One in five deaths can be associated with a bad diet. The leading diseases associated with diet-related deaths in New Zealand are coronary heart disease, stroke, colon, and rectum cancer.
- Those who live with diet-related diseases are more likely to experience poorer mental, social, and educational outcomes.
- Community, non-governmental, and non-profit organisations deliver several initiatives tackling the food system, particularly around urban production, and food environments. However, many of these initiatives face obstacles including policy constraints, funding constraints and lack of influence or access to decision-makers<sup>3</sup>.
- There are also significant and complex underlying systemic issues that cannot be addressed by the community alone e.g., loss of productive land,

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<sup>2</sup> Barlow, C. (1991). Tikanga whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Healthy Families National Report 2021

unsustainable business practices, waste reduction, regulations that can lead to commercial interests favoured over community wellbeing, fragmented approaches to addressing the food system e.g., multiple stakeholders with shared interests working independently

- The COVID-19 pandemic has seen growing discussion around the critical resource of food. And while New Zealand has an abundance of food produced from its land and seas, like many nations it still struggles with food security within its communities. The lockdown period had highlighted the need for resilient local food systems that can deliver food security and food sovereignty back to our communities<sup>4</sup>.

## 4 Introduction

The current unsustainable food system is dominated by the prioritisation of profit over people, leading to insatiable resource extraction and export, corporate control, community disconnection and the prominence of unhealthy food - issues that have been intensified by COVID-19<sup>5</sup>. Sitting behind these themes are people. Aotearoa has one of the highest rates of obesity in the OECD, alongside rising rates of other preventable chronic diseases<sup>6</sup>. Facts we know so well and while our food system remains in this state, our health system will struggle to reduce preventable chronic disease - which is affecting all communities in Aotearoa, and disproportionately affecting Māori and those with fewer material resources.

During the COVID-19 lockdown in March/April 2020, the issue of food insecurity became headlines in media outlets, shining a spotlight on weak points and barriers in our food systems and preventing communities from achieving food security and sovereignty. But it also showcased communities rising to the challenge. Guided by the values of manaaki (to support) and connection, many mobilised and acted to ensure that nobody went hungry during level four lockdown. It also helped many to reconnect with kai in traditional ways. Households around Aotearoa filled their free time with activities centring on food, enjoying the sensory experience that food can provide through experimentation, nostalgia, relaxation, and enjoyment. Online social networks became focal points for sharing recipes, gardening tips, family pride and rethinking ideas about old habits from the pre COVID era.

This research shines a strong and bright light on 3 case studies within Whanganui and what these 3 groups are going to combat this dire situation.

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<sup>4</sup> Healthy Families National Report 2021

<sup>5</sup> Healthy Families National Report 2021

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Health (2019). Household Food Insecurity Among Children: New Zealand Health Survey Summary of findings. Wellington: Ministry of Health

We hold the answers to re-orienting the food system to improve wellbeing, and it simply is focussed from the old saying ... ‘take a person fishing and they will eat for a day, but teach them how to fish and they will eat forever’ ...

Around Aotearoa, we are hearing communities insisting now is the time to move toward Sustainable Food Systems which are regenerative and resilient; prioritise locally grown and affordable kai; and uphold mātauranga (indigenous knowledge), kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and rangatiratanga (leadership).<sup>7</sup>

This report shares inspiring case studies from within Whanganui. It demonstrates how local kai initiatives are contributing to a national movement that could transform how kai is understood, appreciated, grown, and consumed in Aotearoa New Zealand. This research report will show that within Whanganui, we have the solutions to the food insecurity we are experiencing. It will also show the localised movement that clearly shares innovative outcomes and changes in the food system.

This report also shows how working together to see radical transformation of our food system is paramount. A major theme being that in our communities Kai is a major ‘connector’.

### **Kai under a kaupapa Māori lens**

My research shares engagement undertaken within Whanganui where I spoke to kai communities who shared their concerns about kai sovereignty. I heard about how our current food system is leaving many of them behind, disconnecting them from their traditional cultural practices, and putting unhealthy food in the puku or bellies of their tamariki (children).<sup>8</sup>



Illustration by Tom Johnson Whanganui 2021

We talked about the implementation of a Plan of Action that would ensure we could feed ourselves in 10, 25, 50 or 100 years. We discussed how we would best be able to manaaki (being generous in caring and treatment of others) our manuhiri (visitors). Also, how we could bring our parents, grandparents, and whole communities along to create stronger sustainability for our food systems.

My key findings highlighted the basic hypothesis that Kai (food) is all about whakapapa (genealogy). It is the great connector that joins us to our tupuna (ancestors), our mokopuna (descendants), our whānau (families), te taiao (environment), and each other<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Kai Ora Hui – Kimiora Papakainga, Oct 2021

<sup>8</sup> Aotearoa Rongoa Māori Collective hui – Te Putahi-a-Toi, Massey University, 2-4 Sept 2022

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Health (2019). Household Food Insecurity Among Children: New Zealand Health Survey: Summary of findings Wellington: Ministry of Health

Again, through kai we are connected to the plants, the animals, the waterways, the oceans, the forests, and the atua (deities). The recipes of our ancestors get pulled out in modern kitchens, linking us across time and bringing us together around the table to love and learn.

Kai is central to Māori concepts of wellness and for generations it has brought whānau, hapū and iwi together. Kai is medicinal. When it is nutritionally dense and healthy, it feeds and heals our body and mind. When it is grown by our people, in our place, it feeds and heals our spirit.

## 5 Project Scope and Objectives

The desired objective of this Research is to:

- Highlight how a kaupapa Māori lens through Whanganui initiatives can move toward Sustainable Food Systems which are regenerative and resilient.
- Summarise how to prioritise locally grown and affordable kai; and uphold mātauranga (indigenous knowledge), kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and rangatiratanga (leadership).
- Highlight and summarise 3 Case Studies of kaupapa Māori initiatives who help answer the desired objectives of this research
- Evaluate how this example can address the regenerative and resilient sustainable food systems issue that is affecting so many children and whanau in Aotearoa. Also, to suggest recommendations around its sustainability from a kaupapa Māori lens.

## 6 Methodology

### 6.1 Literature Review

The method of approach was to complete a literature review of the available documentation on kai sovereignty and approaches within Aotearoa.

This information is used to understand how Mātauranga Māori plays a part in the regeneration and resilience of food systems in our communities. The purpose was to analyse and review past and current research and theories on my kaupapa (topic) to understand the fundamental views that exist and to critically evaluate and discuss those existing views in relation to the kaupapa (topic).

The research undertaken in this report utilises a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to analyse, conclude, and define a set of key recommendations to key stakeholders that can influence the uptake of regeneration and resilience of proper food systems in our communities.

#### **Stories of Change**

Ka Ora Ka Ako in Whanganui, the Kai Ora Collective and the Healthy Families Initiative in Whanganui are deeper examples of change on the ground. These 3 Case Studies form the crux of my research report.

Each of these stories has a much longer whakapapa, including years of community engagement, many other kai-oriented projects, and hundreds of small stories of change. Each case study has chosen to share one part of their wider story where they demonstrate the diverse and innovative approaches to kai systems and kaupapa Māori changes that are being led out by our local communities within Whanganui. The COVID-19 pandemic made food insecurity much more explicit in our communities and the pressures more acute. Around the country we witnessed an incredible community led response. Local people, and Māori, have led the pivot - treating COVID-19 as an opportunity to address some of our deep systemic issues around kai.

These stories illustrate what kind of collective impact is possible when local people are empowered, enabled, and supported to realise their community sovereignty and to actualise the initiatives that they know are most valuable for their people, in their place.

## 7.1 Case Analysis 1 - Ka Ora Ka Ako – Kimiora Trust



Ka Ora, Ka Ako - Healthy Lunches in Schools is a Ministry of Education initiative till 2023<sup>10</sup>. Kimiora Trust is one of the 5 suppliers of Lunches within the Whanganui Region. The Trusts vision is to grow a regenerative local food system, rooted in Whanganuitanga, and supported by diverse community partnerships that builds on existing community energy to increase access to affordable, nutritious kai<sup>11</sup>. Of most importance is the uplift the mana and wellbeing of our communities across the Whanganui rohe (region). Its strategic framework encourages consistency in approach, efficiency in the use of available resources and increase collaboration to develop local food systems in Whanganui that are regenerative, inclusive, and resilient<sup>12</sup>.

Kimiora Trust since 2012, had been working hard to address food insecurity, rising whānau poverty, and an alarming growth in childhood obesity statistics. The initiatives to address this focussed on growing kai on a mass scale for the community and kura. The Trust also run educational wananga (training) utilising a co-design process to test ideas and seek solutions.

The Trust also ran think tanks within the Whanganui Community to help guide community and system stakeholders to think differently about the learning environments that help longer lasting sustainable changes<sup>13</sup>. After experimenting and adapting a maara training



model to meet the needs of the larger Whanganui community Kimiora Trust applied to the Ministry of Education to become a local Whanganui supplier. The Trust provides children of lower decile primary and intermediate schools in the Whanganui city area with healthy school lunches, which were affordable, accessible, nutritious, and delicious.

Forty-one percent of Whanganui children up to the age of nine, live in areas with a deprivation and so with the Ka Ora Ka Ako

initiative Kimiora Trust have an explicit focus on improving Māori health and reducing inequalities for groups at increased risk of chronic diseases. The Ka Ora, Ka Ako initiative delivers nearly 3500 lunches across 3 schools per week.

In 2021 Kimiora Trust was able to employ 15 staff to make the lunches and has a stable volunteer base that work in the kitchen. The Ka Ora, Ka Ako initiative saw the rise of paid workers from within the Whanganui community.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education, Healthy Lunches in Schools Govt funded initiative 2020

<sup>11</sup> Kimiora Trust: Strategic Plan, 2020-2025

<sup>12</sup> Strategic Plan 2020-2025, Mauriora Tawaroa-Takiari – Operations Manager, Kimiora Trust

<sup>13</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools ' Think Tank' session: March 2022

Findings from the Trusts 'think tanks saw key stakeholders, principals, teachers and whānau talk about tamariki having increased concentration, being calmer and happier at school, less absenteeism, financial relief for parents and caregivers and tamariki experiencing what healthy kai is like by being exposed to real nutrition.

Feedback from the students themselves highlighted changes in their eating habits where sitting down with friends and eating together was a major difference.<sup>14</sup> A positive impact on this initiative has seen the lessening of stress from families who have expressed gratitude that their tamariki are enjoying all kinds of vegetables and fruits, along with expressing an interest in personal health and nutrition for the first time.

Through community design and implementation, Ka Ora Ka Ako is transforming the food reality for Whanganui's tamariki. Providing free food in schools offers many benefits.



### Strengths

- Food in schools has made a difference in increasing access to nutritious food and reducing financial strain on families.
- Having full tummies supports better learning outcomes for many children receiving these lunches; when they eat well, they learn well.
- Eating collectively brings children together and helps to build relationships through food.

"I think it's an incredibly good service to have in the community as it just takes that little bit of pressure off families trying to feed their kids<sup>15</sup>."

"Certainly, for kids learning and stuff, being able to go to school and having a full tummy is important.

"It's had an impact on families' food budgets because getting lunch together for your kids to go to school is a big expense<sup>16</sup>.

"For some of the kids - this is the only meal they get<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools 'Think Tank session', March 2022

<sup>15</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools 'Think Tank session – parent feedback', March 2022

<sup>16</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools 'Think Tank session – parent feedback', March 2022

<sup>17</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools 'Think Tank session – teacher feedback', March 2022



There is still much to be learnt regarding the uptake of Healthy Lunches in Schools within the Whanganui, however.

“Some of it gets thrown out into the pig bucket... it’s food that the kids won’t eat!<sup>18</sup>

“One of the meals was a spinach sandwich - what child is going to eat a spinach sandwich!<sup>19</sup>

“There is a lot of pride, people not owning up to the fact that their children are hungry, you hear stories about children saving lunch so they can eat it at night-time.<sup>20</sup>

“It’s the same system, the same systemic issue of a big company mass producing meals that fit ministry guidelines to make profit<sup>21</sup>.

My research also involved sitting in front of tamariki to seek their advice about how Ka Ora Ka Ako could improve its service. These following insights came out of the discussions.

- Working with and involving children (and families) in designing the menu and making the food has been proven to help turn this around. It also gives them greater visibility and accountability for food waste.
- Introducing free food earlier, i.e., during early childhood education, for it to become a way of life earlier and before unhealthy eating habits and preferences develop.
- Catering to cultural differences in food preferences across different areas of our community.
- Introducing kai in school earlier. For some families where take-out is one of their staple diets, if something like food in schools is introduced at an early childhood level it may become a way of life.
- Seek constant kōrero with the schools and the kids about what they want to eat.

The Healthy Lunches in Schools initiative will end in 2023 for its current providers who are contracted for only a 3-year period around the country.

Currently under evaluation within the Ministry of Education it is not known whether the program will be continued for another 3-year cycle.

<sup>18</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools ‘Think Tank session – teacher feedback’, March 2022

<sup>19</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools ‘Think Tank session – parent feedback’, March 2022

<sup>20</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools ‘Think Tank session – teacher feedback’, March 2022

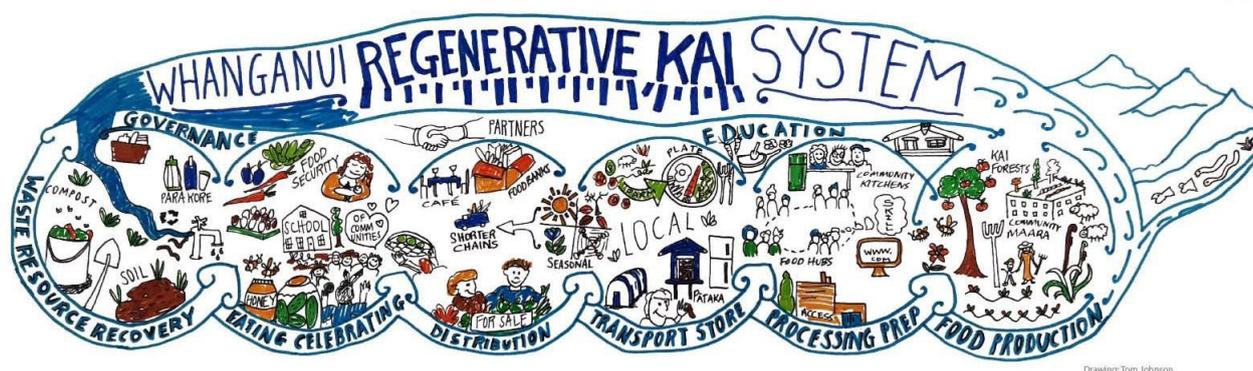
<sup>21</sup> Kimiora Trust: Healthy Lunches in Schools ‘Think Tank session – parent feedback’, March 2022

## 8.1 Case Study 2: Kai Ora Collective – Whanganui



The Kai Ora Collective in Whanganui was set up as a response to the impacts of the Covid Pandemic, in particular responding to Level 3 & 4 for whanau in the Whanganui.

Kai Ora is a collaborative movement of local minds working also to assist transform the kai system in Whanganui. We are creating a Regenerative Local Kai System, rooted in Whanganuitanga, and supported by diverse community partnerships<sup>22</sup>. Building on existing community energy to increase access to local, nourishing and mana-enhancing kai for all the Kai Ora collective has been supporting action-oriented collaboration and enabling local kai initiatives to thrive by connecting them with funding, training, learning opportunities and mentorship.



Supporting whanau (family) resilience within the community of Whanganui the Kai Ora Collective has strived to increase connectivity and collaboration between people on the ground with a focus to share knowledge, ideas, contacts, and opportunities with each other.

Any person or organisation may join Kai Ora if they are committed to the kaupapa and objectives of the Collective. The people and organisations who are a part of Kai Ora are orienting their work around a growing number of focus areas, including: mātauranga Māori, kai growing, kai education, kai policy, kai in schools, and kai distribution.

Kai Ora is organised by looking to our awa (the Whanganui River) and Tupua te Kawa - the ancestral lore that enshrines the relationship between the river and the people<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Johnson: Kai Ora Community Leader, 2021

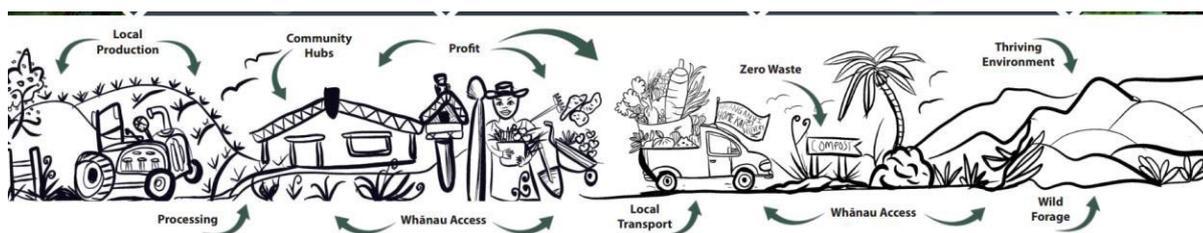
<sup>23</sup> Tom Johnson: Kai Ora Community Leader, 2021

The Kai Ora Collective generated locally specific food insights through engagement with communities impacted by food insecurity. The group began painting a picture of what a regenerative, mana-enhancing kai system in Whanganui could look like. Community leaders began to emerge as champions of local food system transformation. A diverse group gathered regularly to understand these community insights and began to design initiatives that support communities within the Whanganui region to change the local kai context.

One of the key principles that emerged was a focus on collaboration and collectively. By uplifting the existing expertise, passion, and energy in Whanganui the Kai Ora Collective felt that it could achieve greater collective impact as a community-led movement for change.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Kai Ora Collective facilitate community engagement hui that brought together stakeholders in the food system. Kai Ora began attracting collaborators from a diversity of areas, including whānau, health and recreation providers, marae, growers, waste minimisation, Council, and business innovation.<sup>24</sup>

The illustration below, sketched by local designer and Kai Ora Collective leader, Tom Johnson shares the collective desires of the group.



From community engagements the Kai Ora Collective have focussed on ensuring that Mātauranga Māori (Indigenous wisdom) supports local food sovereignty and security where Māori values guide the kai system. Traditional knowledge is honoured as locally relevant and foundational to inform all developments in the kai system. Its point of difference is that Whanganuitanga is the locally specific wisdom that guides the kai system into the future.

The Kai Ora Collective guiding principles focus also on:

- **Small Scale Kai** that is grown, enhanced, and distributed through many small-scale farms, processing facilities, and outlets.
- **Low Processing** that prioritises whole foods, traditional preserving methods and using minimal imported ingredients.
- **Regional Production** where kai is grown locally by people who have deep relationships with the area.
- **Community Oriented** where there is a primary focus on community wellbeing through relationships, reciprocity, and collaboration.
- **Relationships** that are mana-enhancing between people, atua, plants, animals, land, ocean, rivers.

<sup>24</sup> Kai Ora Collective Engagement Plan: 2021

- **Growing Regeneratively** utilising sustainable practices that prioritise the ecological health of soil, air and water, and the social health of people.
- **High Biodiversity** where local farms and communities have high levels of biodiversity. Te Taiao is a healthy and abundant source of kai.
- **Low Carbon** where there is a low impact and activities to reduce carbon emissions.
- **Food Abundance** where food is not exported, so local communities have an abundance of fresh kai which can be preserved for seasons to come.
- **Nutritionally Dense** Healthy soils grow nutrient dense kai that nourishes the body, mind, and spirit.
- **No Waste** Compostable packaging and food waste is recycled, and food is distributed to people who need it<sup>25</sup>.

The Kai Ora Collective have a large focus on education supporting local communities in the Whanganui region to learn growing kai as a connector to their communities. The Collective has a strong focus also on being a political voice for the community in its engagement.

Supporting dialogue around changing local economic policies to actively reduce the costs of local kai where local people can inform what kai comes into the region has been at the forefront of the Collectives discussions. The Collective continues to lobby Local government to support local kai systems and circular economies that eliminate food waste.



Kai Ora Collective, March 2021

<sup>25</sup> Kai Ora Collective Engagement Plan: 2021

## 4.1 Case Analysis 3: Healthy Families NZ – Good Food Road Map

Case study number 3 showcases ‘Healthy Families New Zealand’, it is a government funded prevention initiative across the country.

Over the past 2 years, Healthy Families sites across New Zealand gathered data from whānau and kai stakeholders to build a picture of what was happening around kai during level three and four lockdowns.

This saw a combination of data gathering methods including polls, posts, and messages on community centric social media pages (e.g., Facebook community group pages with high traffic) media scans (e.g., news articles, reports, and interviews) phone calls and interviews with stakeholders and contacts observational data (e.g., supermarket queues, food banks) organisational reports (e.g., Whanganui District Council Council,<sup>26</sup>)

Community Facebook pages and groups provided many responses to questions in levels four and three, but fewer responses were received online during levels two and one as communities moved back to ‘normality’. Rich information and commentary were sparked by social media users asking very ordinary questions. Social networks discussed the shared experience and the minutiae of domesticity. Comments included: “So what are you having for dinner?” “Do you miss takeaways?” “Tried any new recipes?” “What’s growing in your garden?”

Plain language and a single focus had much more of an impact than broad, jargon-filled questions. Insights came from many different spaces, and food came up in conversations about lockdown experiences with social services, wellbeing practitioners, teaching staff, children, and community leaders. Observational data gathering during grocery shopping and watching people share stories and photos online was one of the most effective methods used.

It gave the ability to validate the experiences felt, heard, and saw through weekly reflection.

Healthy Families New Zealand Kai Community of Practice (Kai CoP) backbone team collaborated with Auckland University Masters students to theme national insights, aligning them to the ‘Six Conditions for Systems Change’ and the action areas of the Good Food



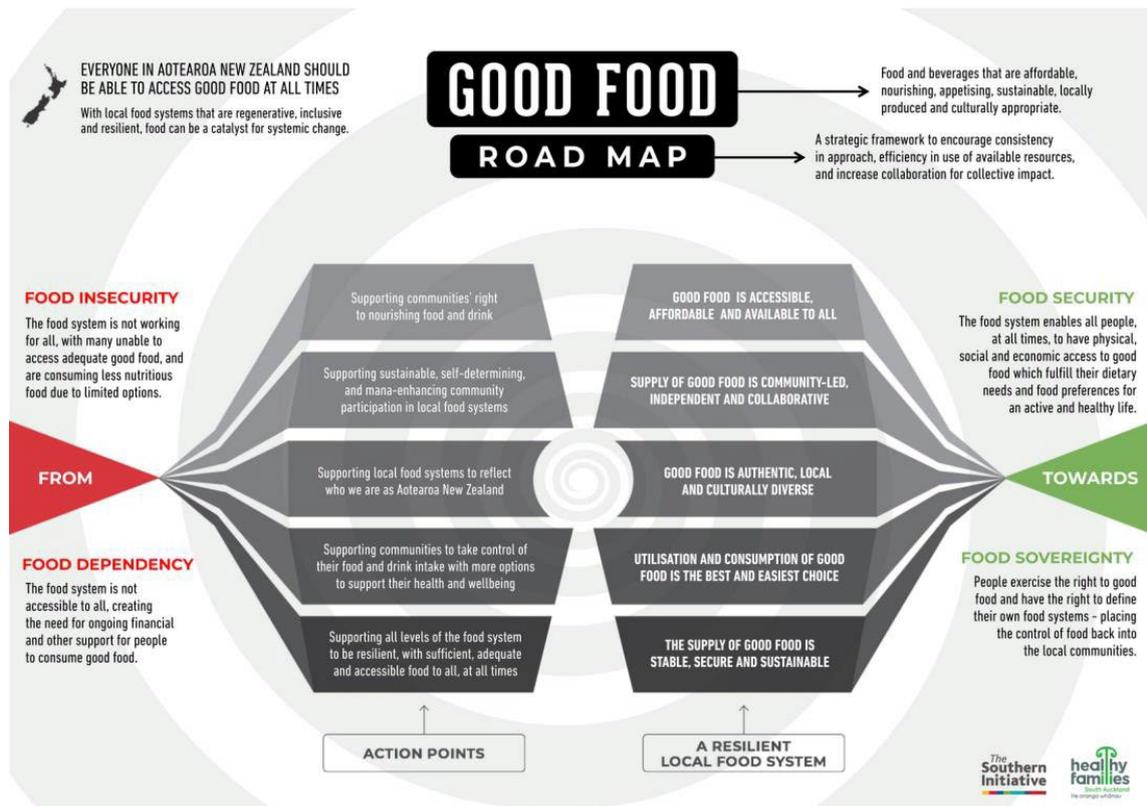
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& Resilient  
EASIEST CHOICE =  
HEALTHIEST CHOICE

<sup>26</sup> Healthy Families Community Response report: November 2021

Road Map. Over 500 data points were collected and from these, five emerging themes were explored. The analysis divided the data into three sections: behaviours, attitudes, and structures around kai before COVID-19 behaviours and attitudes during level four and three lockdown the opportunities in our communities for building a resilient, local food system coming out of level two. The Kai CoP team developed five main themes to help frame up ‘how might we’ questions for collective design<sup>27</sup>. I have included these in this report.



## Moving Forward

Healthy Families New Zealand teams across the country have been working to help develop and establish sustainable local food systems long before COVID-19. The pandemic and insights captured in this report have only reinforced the urgent need to act on our food systems. That is, to move them from the status quo of food insecurity and food dependency towards food security and food sovereignty. Healthy Families New Zealand has an important role to play to ensure a decisive cross-government response is achieved, and solutions are formed in partnership with communities, drawing from the collective action opportunities highlighted in this report. This movement will require resilient local food systems to make sure all individuals and whanau have access to food and drink that are affordable, appetising, and nourishing, to improve community health and wellbeing.

<sup>27</sup> Healthy Families Community Response report: November 2021

The following five themes are highlighted below and are used to frame a conversation about opportunities and action to focus on post COVID-19.

### **Key insights**

#### **Insight 1: Kai is the great connector. Manaaki**

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi (With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive).

Whilst isolation and social distancing were the new norm, the value of connection and sharing around food was felt by most whether that be through food relief, picking up groceries or conversations online. Kai connects people with the whenua through growing food. People value knowing the whakapapa (origins) of kai, where it comes from, how it was prepared and who it was prepared by. Having food in the home creates unity and calm. During lockdown it became a central focus of the home, and families connected around mealtimes, cooking together, and finding recipes their tupuna (ancestors) used. Everyone has a human right to experience that in their home.

#### **Insight 2: A food system that can truly reflect the values and needs of the community.**

COVID-19 placed a spotlight on the workings of the mainstream food system and its strengths and weaknesses became more visible to the public. Those who struggled to access kai prior to the pandemic still struggled (e.g., single parents, isolated elderly, large families) and food sovereignty and local resilience were hard to uphold during level four restrictions.

Provision of food relief was an urgent need that became a tight focus in the first two weeks of lockdown for central and local government funding, community organising, service coordination and redistribution of supply. Business as usual in this part of the system has been completely reset. The community rallied in an incredible display of active care to make sure people had food on the table. The deep-rooted resilience of community groups like iwi/hapu/whanau was demonstrated immediately - a whariki (mat/covering) of relationship and connection that meant the needs of people were quickly established and met. This created unity and calmness in the home “knowing we have whānau (family) that are here for our needs so that we have no need to leave home is comforting.” – Kaumatua (elder)

#### **Insight 3: Time allowed healthy habits and good relationships with kai to flourish.**

There was time for reflection and enjoyment of activities grounded in kai. Yet time was a privilege that mainly fell to those who already had it. The habits during lockdown that people were wanting to sustain include spending quality time with whānau, gardening, and healthier food choices instead of the usual takeaways. The way a society functions is a critical factor in enabling the time to participate and develop better food systems and culture.

#### **Insight 4: The food industry demonstrated the capability to quickly adapt**

The way food is sold, distributed, and bought changed in a remarkably short amount of time. In essence, there was a need for fast prototyping in practice - testing, failing, tweaking, and trying again. Supermarkets were able to quickly enact hygiene protocols, rationing of high demand products, dedicated online delivery centres and ensure staff safety and wage adjustments. Smaller grocery stores and organisations offering food relief quickly mobilised to ensure essential work status. Growers, suppliers and food services adapted to lockdown restrictions and pivoted to online platforms for ordering and delivery. Partnerships, innovation, and collaboration blossomed, enabled by technological access and capability. School food programmes: With schools closed, school food programmes had to rapidly change their operating model: Fruit in Schools redirected its supply to Fair Food who then supplied food relief organisations, KidsCan redirected food to remote communities and private ventures pivoted to offering food boxes.

#### **Insight 5: Kai and the emotional journey**

The psychological roller coaster of such an experience had an impact on how people acted as consumers. This experience clearly showed the impact kai had on people's mental and emotional health and wellbeing. The initial shock, anxiety, anger, panic buying of pantry staples and vegetable seedlings, rude behaviour at supermarkets, online shaming, and outrage on community pages; slowly changed as time went by and people got used to the 'new norm'.

This came with a sense of appreciation and reconnection with nature, relative calm, relaxation, and surprise – trying recipes, sharing experiences online, neighbourhood support, sitting down with family to eat, sourdough success, enjoyment of tasks related to food, or trying new habits like online ordering. At the end of level four and other level changes created a different degree of anxiety and a mix of positive anticipation and starting to worry about easing of restrictions.

From level three onwards it was clear that people have changed their relationship with food, also reevaluating the meaning of 'essential services' and therefore how food is key for community resilience<sup>28</sup>. A different sense of pride and kindness was noted amongst community members, with clear intention to promote and support of local suppliers.

#### **Questions for collective action**

The Healthy Families Kai CoP reconvened to discuss the above themes and explore the opportunities for collective action across all sites. Guided by the conversational themes, three high level statements emerged:

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<sup>28</sup> Healthy Families Community Response report: November 2021

*How might we ensure that indigenous systems are a strong part of the food system?*

- share, learn and amplify the stories of Māori responses during lockdown
- the value of indigenous suppliers/procurement and culturally appropriate food stronger readiness
- kai as a catalyst to build rangatiratanga (authority) and sovereignty.

*How might we strengthen equitable, local systems for food sovereignty?*

- representation of Māori and Pacific and Community in government working groups
- strengthen the adaptive capacity of local food systems
- act as a collective monitor and keep accountable key kai stakeholders for a regenerative kai economy.

*How might we influence conditions for food security to move from dependency to resilience?*

- support local, community-led regenerative practices
- encourage and sustain mental models that were created during locked down
- support communities to regain control of their food supplies
- support food relief organisations to collaborate and understand their role in food resilience and systems change.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> case study has been able to showcase that Healthy Families New Zealand teams across the country have been working to help develop and establish sustainable local food systems long before COVID-19. The pandemic and insights captured in this report have only reinforced the urgent need to act on our food systems. That is, to move them from the status quo of food insecurity and food dependency towards food security and food sovereignty.

From my findings, Healthy Families New Zealand has an important role to play to ensure a decisive crossgovernment response is achieved, and solutions are formed in partnership with communities, drawing from the collective action opportunities highlighted in this report. This movement will require resilient local food systems to make sure all individuals and whanau have access to food and drink that are affordable, appetising, and nourishing, to improve community health and wellbeing.

It is important to acknowledge the enormous amount of work and thought leadership that has been reaffirmed and/or emerged throughout these unprecedented times. There are plenty of well-structured stand-alone initiatives in New Zealand that, together, can create a powerful movement towards a sustainable food system<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Healthy Families Community Response report: November 2021

## Recommendations

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*He kai kei aku ringa – Food provided by my own hands<sup>30</sup>*

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This research report has been a culmination of collaborations within Whanganui and interwoven with mātauranga (knowledge) shared over the years by Whanganui kaumatua. The whakataukī I utilise refers to our capacity to provide the necessary resources and access to the environment that caters for our needs to ensure sustainability and ongoing prosperity.

It acknowledges the effort and skill needed to ensure that this happens. The product of being able to feed ourselves requires us to return and once again familiarise ourselves with the cycle of kai and the health of the environment that also needs to be nurtured to produce kai. This research report suggests the following recommendations.

- That **Kai equity is a priority** focussed on supporting communities' right to nourishing food and drink.
- That **Kai sovereignty is a priority** - supporting sustainable, self-determining, and mana-enhancing community participation in local food systems.
- That **Kai culture and traditions are a priority** - supporting food systems to reflect the diverse and multi-ethnic society of Aotearoa-New Zealand.
- That **Kai for health and well-being is a priority** - supporting individuals and whānau to take control of their food and drink intake via a food system where the best choice is the easiest choice.
- That **Kai resilience is a priority** - supporting all levels of the food system to be resilient ensuring the supply of sufficient, adequate, and accessible food to all, in the face of various and even unforeseen disturbances.
- That **Government legislation and policies shall** give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in particular the right of Māori to food security and the protection, maintenance, retention, control, and decision-making authority over their traditional and customary kai sources, kai systems, and kai practices. This can be immediately implemented in any new legislation or policy and amended in existing legislation or policy within the next 9 years (three government terms) to redress and restore the

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<sup>30</sup> Whakataukāki, shared by the late Pikiteora Tawaroa-Takiari, Nga Paerangi, Ngati Tuera, Ngati Hinearō

well-being, health, social, cultural, economic, and environmental inequities upon Māori.

- That **Kaupapa Māori methodologies** are adopted that are informed by āhuatanga Māori (Māori perspectives) according to tikanga Māori (customs) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge).
- That a **regenerative local kai system**, rooted in Whanganuitanga, and supported by diverse community partnerships continues to be enhanced at a local Council level that builds on existing community energy to increase access to local, affordable, nutritious kai.
- That Developing a *Whanganui Sustainable Kai Pathway* where our values lead our local food system. This pathway would inform our alleviation of food insecurity by taking a realistic approach based on harnessing international experience and local knowledge; leveraging existing resources from different stakeholders; and working together to influence policy and behavioural changes.
- That an **action-oriented collaboration** enables local food initiatives to thrive by connecting them with funding, training, learning opportunities and mentorship. Where our whānau and communities are connected by kai and can meaningfully participate in the food system.

In conclusion, we have the capacity to restore the damage caused by global consumerism, by resetting the 'GPS' and rerouting our knowledge that food is health, food is medicine, food is ceremony, and that access to good local food is a fundamental human right. When connected with the following whakatauākī from our Whanganui rangatira Rangitihī Tahuparae, in this case it challenges us to seriously review and dismantle food systems that no longer serve us and are in fact harmful

Mai i te urunga o Ngai Tāua te iwi Māori ki roto i ngā kāwai mātauranga o Tauīwi, ina, honotia te peka Māori ki te rākau rāwaho, he rerekē tōna hua me te rongo o tōna kiko, he kawa. Kāti, tēnei te whakahoki ki ngā paiaka ā kui mā, ā Koro mā

Let us return to our origins - since the time we as Māori were immersed in the knowledge streams of tauīwi we have become like a branch, grafted to a foreign tree, producing fruit of a different quality and somewhat unpalatable. It is time we returned to the rootstock of our ancestors.

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## Illustrations/Images

1. Whanganui Regenerative Kai System, Tom Johnson, Whanganui
2. Kai is the connector – Tom Johnson
3. Image 1 – Ka Ora Ka Ako, Kaumatua Support, Kiritahi Firmin
4. Image 2 - Ka Ora Ka Ako, Kaumatua Support, Kiritahi Firmin
5. No wonder we have obesity, Tom Johnson, Whanganui
6. Local Production Roadmap, Tom Johnson, Whanganui
7. Easiest Choice/Healthiest Choice, Tom Johnson, Whanganui
8. Whanganui Food Roadmap