

KAI SECURITY IN THE NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT



Introduction

This report builds on the interim report delivered in October 2024.

The process and subsequent report has included desk-based analysis reviewing existing literature and resources (see Appendix 2) as well as face-to-face engagement with stakeholders, including one-to-one sessions with individual organisations and collective sessions with groups of organisations (see Appendix 1).

Key themes

1. Hunger is a complex symptom of a wide range of factors. Hunger is often the result of a multiplicity of factors coinciding within an individual's or whanau's lives;
2. The drivers of hunger are often system level issues such as poverty, access to affordable housing, socio-economic background and access to opportunities;

3. Hunger may be a recurring issue for some individuals/whanau, but may not be constantly present for them. Equally, hunger may become an issue for an individual or whanau who have previously not experienced this issue due to an unforeseen change in circumstances;
4. Responses to hunger require an ecosystem approach that connects emergency food responses with work to build kai resilience while also ensuring those who are hungry can easily connect to wider services that they may need. All of these approaches also need to be embedded within wider food system/structure, agriculture, climate change and economic policies and strategies (see Appendix 3);
5. There is an enormous amount of work underway already including community level emergency food and kai resilience responses and economic-led responses around the food system and future growing opportunities for the region;
6. There is a lot of food being made available through a huge array of providers including volunteer-led soup kitchens and community cafes, food banks, food rescue, social supermarkets, meal providers, community gardens and community based growing/sharing networks;
7. Hunger is therefore an immensely complex issue which already has an enormous amount of activity being directed to it. A regional strategy should not seek to become a barrier to what is already underway and we need to recognise that a strategy cannot expect to resolve hunger. However, steps can be taken to enhance the work of the existing ecosystem and to reduce the prevalence and impact of hunger.



Drivers of hunger

Food insecurity in Aotearoa is about inequalities and not because we have a food deficit – there is enough food, but many people/whanau struggle to be able to access it. Food insecurity is therefore experienced by individuals but driven by systems. It is complex and interconnected with other health and social issues. In a broad sense, the underpinning key drivers of food insecurity are inadequate incomes, meeting the costs of food and other essential needs (including and especially the cost of housing), and factors associated with our food system – including our retail grocery sector which appear to generate the persistence of high food costs. New Zealand consistently ranks in the top 10 most expensive OECD countries to buy food.

It is estimated that 15-20% of New Zealand's population experience food insecurity, with rates being much higher (up to 40%) for Māori and Pacific Island communities and for those living with disabilities.

Responding to these system level issues is beyond the scope of this report, but remains important to the context of responding to the impact of food insecurity within the Taranaki region.

Summary of findings

Matauranga Māori

A Māori understanding of kai encompasses food in the context of an ecosystem of whakapapa, identity, whanau, social, community and environmental relationships from the past, present and future. Essentially, kai belongs to all, is to be created by all, and needs to be shared with all. To have a system that champions kai is to have one that champions community and champions whenua.

Harnessing matauranga Māori knowledge needs to avoid inadvertently seeking to appropriate this knowledge. A genuine Te Tiriti process based on relationship building would forge partnerships through which this knowledge can be shared.

It's an onion

Our engagement across the food ecosystem confirmed that any attempt to enhance food outcomes for individuals, whanau and communities, needs to understand the layers of the onion that describe these issues. When a hungry person or whanau is placed at the centre of the onion responses to their hunger need to incorporate 3 specific layers:

1. Emergency food provision – responding to the immediate impact of their lack of access to the food they need. This is primarily driven through food parcels, food rescue and social supermarkets;
2. Kai resilience – building their capacity to enhance their own access to food. This includes extending knowledge about growing (through both participation in community gardens and developing growing at home), support to develop cooking skills, and support to enhance budgeting skills.

Within the kai resilience space, it is important to include the findings of research into community gardens and understand the potential limitations of community gardens as a core response to hunger. Two points in particular should be noted:

- Community gardens are primarily seeking to generate Hauora/wellbeing outcomes. The connections gained within a garden and the physical and mental processes associated with cultivation contribute to mental health and general wellbeing.
- Community gardens rarely flourish beyond the short-term unless they are resourced to enable paid coordination. Entirely volunteer based or community run gardens will often fade overtime as initial enthusiasm wanes.

3. Access to services – hunger is a symptom of other factors impacting on the life of a person or whanau. These issues will include one or some of the following:

- Lack of adequate income, often compounded by the high cost of housing and other household costs leading to the inability to afford the often high cost of food;
- Poor budgeting skills compounded by multiple debts;
- Mental health and/or addictions impacting one or more members of a household;

It is therefore essential that responses to food insecurity are well integrated with the wider social service support structures of the region so that accessing food can be a gateway that enables those individuals/whanau with wider support needs to find the help they need.

It should also be noted that hunger does not only affect the most vulnerable in our communities, nor is it only something experienced by those with multiple or complex needs. Many individuals/whanau may be one crisis away from experiencing food insecurity. This may be an unexpected issue with their car, an unexpected medical or dental bill, an increase in rental or mortgage payments or the loss of a job. For some whanau they will experience food insecurity intermittently, moving in and out of food insecurity over time.

Local providers and communities are responding

This process has sought to engage from the ground up so that any recommendations come from a deep appreciation of the needs being experienced and a thorough understanding what is already happening. Engagement across emergency food providers, organisations engaged in kai resilience work, communities leading local responses around gardens and growing, passionate individuals and groups organizing meals for those in need, with Iwi and hapu, with funders and education providers and with agencies across social and economic focus areas has been extensive.

As a region we can be proud of the responses this commitment and energy continues to enable. Generosity of time and spirit is evident and there is an incredible amount of food being made available to those who are hungry.

More significantly, the individuals and organisations within the food ecosystem recognize that more can be done and are actively collaborating and seeking ways to enhance what is already happening.

This is not to say that the ecosystem is perfect or that relationships are always positive or that responses to new opportunities are always effective. However, there is much to celebrate and a robust platform from which to build into the future. Some highlights include:

- Waitara Foodbank Pataka Kai – the Waitara foodbank has evolved under a new strategy and now includes cooking classes and a community garden alongside emergency food parcels. They continue to move towards a Waitara food hub approach.
- On The House – continue to innovate and explore impactful models from around the country so that food rescue sits within a growing suite of responses. Their logistical expertise is supporting conversations within the ecosystem about more effective ways of responding.
- WITT and Parihaka are intentionally focusing on education, offering programmes to enhance our regional capacity for sustainable food production. Regional scholarship providers including Bashford-Nicholls Trust and L A Alexander Trust are supporting these programmes to enable students from all socio-economic levels to access this knowledge.
- Venture Taranaki are actively exploring the future of growing and land use through Branching Out.

Iwi and Māori organisations are already making significant progress around food security, including at the whanau, hapu, Marae level and at the larger land use, system level.

Examples include:

- the extensive development of the mara kai at Parihaka and their education focus including the Kai Oranga horticulture programme they are offering,
- Pounamu Skelton was recently funded through the PIVOT Award to continue to implement Te Rau o Rongo: He maramataka mō Taranaki. This research on maramataka o Taranaki could help us better evidence an approach to hauora that reflects Indigenous practices of growing and gathering kai.
- PKW are also investing significantly in research into sustainable land use practices and understanding the history of our regional whenua.

There are many more examples that could be included, but the key finding is that the region does not necessarily need a new strategy for responding to food insecurity, but needs to find ways to continue to resource the innovation and encourage the collaboration that is already happening, continuing to enable a community-led response to needs.

South Taranaki process

This report has been prepared as a summary of the findings gained from the process initiated by New Plymouth District Council. Although the process has taken time to explore regional and national activity and themes, it has been broadly north Taranaki focused.

The Community and Whānau Wellbeing Team at the Taranaki District Health Board have been undertaking a similar process across the South Taranaki area and are set to hold two hui on 30 May and 4 July with food security and kai resilience organisations. These hui will explore how those providers see food security and kai resilience responses evolving for South Taranaki into the future. The findings of this process and any collaborative structures that emerge should be taken note of. There may be opportunities to integrate the findings of this report and the outcomes of the south Taranaki process.



Regional processes and systems

As discussed below in the limitations section, food insecurity will be impacted by regional processes and systems including future land use, healthy waterways and biodiversity and our approach to sustainable living in response to climate change. Many stakeholders are involved at this level including Venture Taranaki, the Regional Council, Local councils, Sustainable Taranaki, Wild For Taranaki, Iwi and hapu. Continuing to connect these processes to food insecurity is important, but is unlikely to be within the capacity of the providers operating in the emergency food, kai resilience and social service spaces. It is therefore important for better resourced agencies and entities to be intentional about engaging outside of their immediate spheres and recognize their role within a wider food security ecosystem.



Recommendations

South Taranaki process

Note the findings of the South Taranaki process and work to ensure they are integrated with the findings of this report to help generate a regionally consistent response.

Building and resourcing the ecosystem

Develop a regional collaboration to act as a strategic connector.

Inevitably organisations involved in responding to food insecurity or kai resilience will be focused on specific activities. While this process has shown that exploration of new ideas and a focus on collaboration is evident across the ecosystem, there is an opportunity to intentionally support the ecosystem to remain connected and to have the capacity to explore and pilot new ideas.

To achieve this there is an opportunity for a regional collaboration to be formed that provides resourcing to allow the players within the ecosystem to gather infrequently, but regularly (maybe twice per year) and to engage in a facilitated discussion about gaps and opportunities. This collaboration would not be focused just on understanding what is already happening, but would provide capacity to identify new ideas that can help inform what might happen.

It is important that any such collaborative structure was designed as an enabler, not a barrier. The collaboration would seek to enhance what is already happening it would not be set up as a body that in anyway approved (or otherwise) the work and aspirations of the existing players of the ecosystem.

Building relationships with iwi, hapu and Māori organisations should form part of this enhanced collaboration, noting the detailed comments in the matauranga Māori section.

Funding focus

Lead a funder collaboration for all agencies involved in funding food security or kai resilience.

Moving forward all funding bodies seeking to resource the food security ecosystem and those with a strategic interest in food security/kai resilience within the region should ensure they are themselves collaborating so that funding and strategic intent is consistent and cohesive and does not inadvertently resource duplication.

Within this recommendation is the need for those agencies engaging in economic development, land use evolution, water futures and sustainability (all of which impact food security for the region) to actively and intentionally seek to connect with the food security and kai resilience ecosystem around them.

Advocacy and Intent

Use the potential reach of New Plymouth District Council to advocate for organisations active within our region's food security and kai resilience ecosystem.

As a region there is an opportunity for agencies with influence to become well informed advocates seeking to influence at a systems level in a way that can enhance food security and kai resilience outcomes. Any such advocacy should not be done in isolation, but through effective engagement with the food security and kai resilience ecosystem. Focus points for such advocacy may include:

- Support policies that make nutritious food affordable.
- Advocate for local food producers.
- Prioritise support and resources for kai creators and educators.
- Celebrate and resource sustainable farming practices.



Short-term actions

The following 4 actions emerged as quick wins that could lead to positive changes in the shorter-term:

1. Work to complete an interactive kai map that quickly shows who is operating, what they offer and when. This should include everything from food parcels through to community gardens;
2. Work with Sustainable Taranaki to implement the Community Garden Strategy;

3. Lead a collaboration of key agencies funding the food security / kai resilience ecosystem. This should include NPDC, TOI Foundation, MSD, and TDHB;
4. Resource and lead the creation of a collaborative structure to support the overall ecosystem. Ensure this is an enabling body, not a barrier or additional hurdle.

Limitations and Out of Scope

This process has sought to identify and understand what is happening across the food security / kai resilience ecosystem and who is leading this work. Through extensive engagement across this ecosystem the process has sought to identify new opportunities and has framed these in the suggested recommendations. This report does not represent a strategy for the eradication of hunger, nor is such an outcome possible in the short to medium-term.

As noted above, this process and the recommendations of this report cannot solve the system level issues contributing to food insecurity, including high food prices, high housing costs, and socio-economic factors including lack of adequate income. However, these remain important contextual realities within which the recommendations of this report must be implemented.

It should be noted that a true food security approach would also incorporate an understanding of wider food system developments including regional growing strategies and distribution channels including supermarkets, it would also be cognisant of emergency management strategies to ensure the supply of food during times of crisis.

Venture Taranaki through Branching Out are exploring the future agriculture/growing opportunities for the region and local emergency management strategies will include responses to food access in times of crisis.

Furthermore, food resilience ultimately requires a focus on developing a local food system that is environmentally responsible and resilient supported by ecosystems that are flourishing because of responsible land and water stewardship. Many organisations are engaging at this level including local Councils, the Regional Council, Iwi, Sustainable Taranaki and Wild For Taranaki.

WITT is also contributing to teaching knowledge and skills that will contribute to more diverse food production, and that will help to position Taranaki as a future food bowl. This includes the L4 Certificate in Organic Primary Production. Education in horticulture, agriculture and growing is also being supported by local Iwi, PKW, Parihaka and scholarship providers such as the L A Alexander Trust and Bashford-Nicholls Trust.

Appendix 3 attempts to provide a comprehensive structure that includes all of these elements, but much of this was out of scope for this process.



Appendix 1 – Organisations Engaged With

On The House

Waitara Foodbank Pataka Kai

New Plymouth Foodbank

The Salvation Army Taranaki Community Ministries

Sustainable Taranaki

PARS (Prisoner Aid and Rehabilitation Services)

YMCA

Pounamu Skelton, E Rau E Rongo

Parihaka Mara Kai

Te Kahui o Taranaki - Tatai Tangata ki te Whenua (Maara Kai) Kaupapa

Tatai Tangata ki te Whenua for Maara Kai Programme

Inglewood Food Hub

Stratford Foodbank

Hawera Foodbank

Opunake Foodbank

St Mary's Hawera Community Garden

Garden to Table Trust

KOIA

Taranaki Farmers Market

WISE charitable trust

Community and Whanau Wellbeing Team, Te Whatu Ora / TDHB

Ministry of Social Development

TOI Foundation

Community and Economic Development Team, New Plymouth District Council

Venture Taranaki

WITT

The Wellington City Mission

Regen Ag Taranaki

Appendix 2 – Strategies and Resources Reviewed

A Vision and Recommended Goals Towards a Food Secure Communities Plan for Taranaki, Sustainable Taranaki, July 2022

Behaviour Change and Community Energy, Sustainable Taranaki and Silk Advisory, June 2021

Taranaki Regional Strategic Plan, Salvation Army Community Ministries, 2023-24

Taranaki Kai Strategy, Rautapatu Foundation, 2024

How to talk about rebalancing our food ecosystem to make it work for everyone, The Workshop, 2023

Nourished and Empowered Communities: A 2 Year Plan, Food Secure North Canterbury, 2021

Annual Report, Food Secure North Canterbury, 2022

The Waikato Wellbeing Project <https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz/about/>

Feeding Murihiku Good Food Road Map, Murihiku Kai Collective, 2023

Kai Experiences in te Awa Kairangi, Healthy Families Hutt Valley, 2020,

Kai Motuhake, Re-indigenising and re-localising food systems, Zero Hunger Collective, 2024

Mana Kai, a framework for korero on enhancing Aotearoa New Zealand's Food System, The Aotearoa Circle

Mana Kai Mana Ora, Western Bay of Plenty Food Sovereignty & Security Plan, Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective, 2021

Sustainability Impact Report, On The House, 2024

The One Hundred Whanau Food and Financial Hardship Report, Vision West, 2022

Food Sovereignty and Equitable Food Systems, Centre for Social Impact, 2023

Community Garden Strategy, Sustainable Taranaki, 2024

Hauora Māori Priorities, Te Punanga Ora Iwi Māori Partnership Board, 2024

Community Health Plan, Te Punanga Ora Iwi Māori Partnership Board, 2024

Te Anamata A-Kai o To Tatou Taone, Our City's Food Future, Wellington City Council, 2023

Want Among Plenty, Framing food insecurity in the Waikato Region, Waikato Wellbeing Project, 2024

Good Neighbour <https://goodneighbour.co.nz/community-gardens/>

Appendix 3 – the elements of a food security and food resilience ecosystem

Creating a food secure and food resilient ecosystem involves integrating various strategies and frameworks to ensure that food systems are robust, adaptable, and capable of withstanding shocks. The elements of the ecosystem include the following:

1. Food Security

Definition: Ensuring that all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

Key Components:

- **Availability:** Sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis.
- **Access:** Having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious diet.
- **Utilization:** Knowledge and resources to enable effective use of food to deliver a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients.
- **Stability:** Access to adequate food at all times, without risk of losing access due to sudden shocks or cyclical events.

2. Food Resilience

Definition: The capacity of food systems and communities to absorb, recover, and adapt to various shocks and stresses, such as climate change, economic crises, and pandemics.

Key Components:

- **Diversity:** Promoting a variety of crops and livestock to reduce dependency on a single food source.
- **Redundancy:** Ensuring multiple pathways and sources for food production and distribution.
- **Connectivity:** Strengthening linkages between different parts of the food system to enhance coordination and support.
- **Adaptive Capacity:** Building the ability of food systems to learn, adapt, and transform in response to changing conditions.

3. Integrating Food Security and Resilience

Framework:

- **Assessment:** Regularly evaluate the vulnerabilities and strengths of the food system.
- **Planning:** Develop strategic plans that incorporate both immediate food security needs and long-term resilience goals.
- **Implementation:** Execute programs that address food security while enhancing resilience, such as sustainable agricultural practices, local food systems, and community-based initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continuously monitor progress and adapt strategies based on feedback and changing conditions.

4. Practical Steps

Short-Term Actions:

- **Emergency Food Assistance:** Provide immediate relief to those facing acute food insecurity.
- **Support Local Agriculture:** Invest in local food production to reduce dependency on external sources.
- **Enhance collaboration, partnerships and networks:**
- Collaboration between local government, non-profits, and community groups is essential.
- Integrating these components creates a robust food ecosystem that can withstand emergencies and ensure food security for all its residents.

Local Iwi and Hapū:

- Indigenous communities play a significant role in managing local resources and ensuring food security. They often have traditional knowledge and practices that contribute to resilience, such as sustainable fishing and gardening techniques. Harnessing matakāwhiri Māori knowledge needs to avoid inadvertently seeking to appropriate this knowledge. A genuine Te Tiriti process based on relationship building would forge partnerships through which this knowledge can be shared.

Long-Term Actions:

- **Sustainable Practices:** Promote sustainable farming techniques that protect the environment and ensure long-term productivity.

- **Policy Development:** Advocate for policies that support food security and resilience, such as subsidies for sustainable agriculture and investments in food infrastructure.
- **Education and Training:** Equip communities with the knowledge and skills to manage their food systems effectively.