

# Puta Ora Food Security Initiatives

This report provides an overview of progress reports from Puta Ora Food Security Initiatives. Topics covered in this report include approaches to food security, challenges, examples of good practice and considerations for the future.

## Background

The Puta Ora fund supports community organisations to implement or scale-up initiatives that:

- increase access to affordable, healthy and sustainable kai for people, whānau and communities who experience the highest levels of food insecurity; and/or
- enable Māori to exercise food sovereignty; and
- will be sustainable in the long term.

In April 2023, **75 applicants** received funding in the form of contributory grants. Grants varied from **\$11,627 - \$100,000**, with most providers receiving a grant of \$50,000.

These grants are for a period of 12 months, with an interim report due in October 2023 and a final report due in June 2024.

This funding builds on previous funding rounds of the Food Secure Communities Grant Fund and the Food Secure Communities Implementation Fund. Reports on previous funding rounds are available [here](#).

Funded initiatives include vegetable co-operatives, affordable food programmes, teaching or information sharing workshops, social enterprises, household and community vegetable gardens.

These initiatives are led by a variety of funded service providers including community groups, Māori, Pasifica, faith based and other social service providers.

## Themes and examples from progress reports

A number of common themes were identified from the various progress reports submitted. We have also included a few examples of successful initiatives to illustrate these themes.

### Puta Ora funding enabled communities to grow and produce more food

Many communities identified the need to develop gardens to provide vegetables for low-income communities. Funding enabled communities to purchase equipment, set up raised beds and plant culturally-appropriate crops.

Challenges to this mahi included the theft of equipment, delays from bad weather, and flood damage. Maintaining skilled volunteer support was also an issue. This was overcome by providing education workshops, or by empowering whānau to create backyard gardens. Some gardens have now reached a scale where an expert gardener gains an income from sales of produce to ensure long term sustainability (see the Ahoaho example on the next page).

### The variety of food producing initiatives included:

- Community gardens and māra kai, including edible gardens close to social or transitional housing.
- Larger scale market gardens or urban farms being established or expanded including setting production targets and leasing further land.
- Community composting initiatives which are increasing soil health and decreasing costs for community gardens and backyard gardens.
- Growing seedlings for individual and community groups gardens or for sale.
- A variety of home edible gardens depending on community needs. For example raised gardens and small transportable gardens for city housing
- Growing culturally appropriate kai for migrant and refugee families. For example, community gardens are growing fava beans, taro leaves and kumara.

These projects benefit the community by improving the supply of affordable healthy food, improving nutrition intake and physical activity levels, providing local employment and connections to social support. Increased availability of food has been reported to reduce stress and improve focus on education for young people.

With support from MSD the horticultural block of land at Ōtaki College has been developed into a market garden. Vegetables are grown and sold at a weekly market, with the proceeds providing a gardener with a job. Boxes of affordable organic vegetables are sold weekly to help the garden to become self-sustainable. Regular courses in horticulture (run by Papa Taiao Earthcare) are delivered in the gardens for college students. They offer rangatahi a chance to get hands-on experience in regenerative growing, sustainability and conservation while in school. Students can come into the gardens to help out, for some this can provide needed time out from the rigours of school work, or other challenges in life. They learn about growing plants, how to look after the tools and how to use various edible plants.



An example of market gardens providing affordable food, employment and work ready skills - Ahoaho Market Garden at Ōtaki College

### Education programmes delivered with Puta Ora funding have encouraged participants to develop gardening, cooking and other food related skills

Many initiatives held workshops to teach and share food related skills, bringing the community together. Community organisations had identified some people lack some basic food related skills and provided workshops to teach people how to provide for themselves, even on low incomes.

Workshops were held in community venues, gardens, or kitchens and provided hands-on learning for people. Kaupapa included traditional Māori food and growing knowledge. “Participants have gained essential gardening skills and knowledge about Māori traditions and practices, ensuring they can continue to produce their own food.”

Topics varied and included growing your own food; cooking; storing and using produce; preserving; budgeting; gathering and foraging food; hunting; and fishing. Some workshops focused on young people and developing work ready skills.

## An example of developing youth work ready skills

Ko Te Tuara Totara o Fordlands have a vegetable garden with workshops for young people covering cooking, gardening, woodwork, growing and selling seedlings. This has developed work ready skills and leadership skills for young men with few local opportunities. **“K helped design our Alternative Education Programme, he was one of the main leaders. Since then, he is one of our main volunteers in the garden, K knew how to do fencing and he taught the staff as well. K is a natural leader and through Puta Ora he has been able to learn more skills which will be transferable to future employment.”**

## Puta Ora Funding has invested in social enterprises that increased access to healthy and affordable food in communities

Community providers have developed social enterprise approaches to use income from selling food to create sustainable services. Examples include:

- Upcycling rescued food into meals.
- Using a business such as a café for income to provide social services to the community.
- Delivering affordable, healthy, food into communities by weekly markets, online sales or vegetable co-operatives
- Market and community gardens providing surplus produce to food banks to reach those most in need.



### Community food co-operatives

Vegetable co-operatives are starting to include other food such as meat or pantry staples to increase the nutrition available. Examples of other meat production initiatives include wild meat processing and eggs from backyard chickens.

Community food co-operatives have noted a range of challenges:

- The high cost of food and low margins on pantry staples has made it hard for small vegetable co-operatives to expand their food offerings.
- Where there are many free food options, affordable food co-operatives cannot compete. Co-operative location and proximity to free food options needs to be considered.
- Small co-operatives can struggle with budget or accessing relevant skills for marketing to gain and retain paying customers.



### Supporting communities to develop low-cost fruit and vegetable co-operatives across the country

The Salvation Army in Whangarei are working with [Food Together](#) to establish an affordable food co-operative service throughout Northland. Access to affordable food is a significant issue in Northland, especially the more remote Far North. The initiative provides fruit and vegetable boxes at prices 25% lower than market value to whānau who order them from an online website.

Achievements to date include establishing Whangarei as the central food packing hub; creating and strengthening relations with key partners within Whangarei; expansion of operations to Dargaville; and a marketing and social media campaign for new food box customers. In the first 20 weeks they sold 625 fruit and vegetable boxes.

## Community collaboration and volunteers maximised food security impact

Many initiatives collaborate with other government agencies, businesses, trusts or schools to gain funding or donations. They collaborate to benefit from alignment and shared resources.

Most providers rely on a pool of volunteers to undertake much of the work of their initiatives. While this lowers costs there can be issues, for example “work in our garden has been delayed as all our volunteers were needed in the food bank”.

Some initiatives are in areas such as the East Cape and Far North, where access to healthy affordable kai is particularly difficult. Geographic isolation can result in transport expenses and difficulties finding rural staff. In the East Cape communities have been reached by collaborating with remote community groups.

People in need of food often need other social services. Social service agencies found they connect with people in need when they provide food and wrap around support. Some initiatives provide budgeting advice, and most provide referrals to other services.

Providers noted volunteering had many benefits including:

- Reduced loneliness in the elderly.
- Connection to culture – migrant communities supporting each other, working in community gardens and enjoying meals together.
- Strengthening the feeling of community and the relationships with each other.



### An example of a social enterprise providing complementary social services to the community

Affirming Works are a Pasifika organisation with two community cafes in south Auckland. These provide affordable kai and a wraparound community service, addressing the social and health needs of customers. Their aim is for whānau to be able to support themselves.

The cafes aim to be financially self-sustaining, so food is available for those in need without external funding. To support the cafés and other services, Affirming Works are selling coffee produced through their social enterprise operation in Tonga. Puta Ora has contributed to the initiative by helping to upgrade the central food hub kitchen where much of the kai is prepared.

## Funding for food sovereignty empowered Māori communities to produce more food

The Puta Ora fund aims to enable Māori to exercise food sovereignty, and this is being undertaken in many ways, from market gardens to the creation of māra kai involving sharing traditional knowledge. The term ‘food sovereignty’ refers to a food system in which the people who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the approach to and means of food production and distribution. Māori food sovereignty “empowers whānau and hapū driven food production” (Hutchings, 2015).

Māori food providers have increased food production for their people through a number of avenues:

- Affordable local vegetable boxes deliver variety for local customers.
- Community gardens often support food banks for people with high needs.
- Developing māra kai onsite at marae utilising resources such as Māori-owned land, providing healthy food for the local community.
- Māori are often utilising organic methods to grow kai while also preserving the environment.
- Another initiative with environmental benefits was a project where waterways were planted to clean-up the water, and where watercress is grown for foraging.

Workers and volunteers have found gardening empowering and useful for supporting their families. “By teaching essential gardening skills, the program empowers participants to independently grow their own food. This self-sufficiency contributes to food sovereignty as it reduces reliance on external sources for sustenance.”

Workshops have shared gardening and Māori traditional knowledge using intergenerational connections.

**“Whānau are learning skills and knowledge to grow māra, hua rakau, nurture, harvest as well as preserve, cook and create nutritious kai for themselves and their whānau based on Maturanga māori principles.”**

Workshops also included rongoa (plant based medicine), planting by the Māramataka (lunar calendar) and use of native plants for garden shelter belts and waterways. “By incorporating Māori practices, such as the Māori calendar and discussions about whakapapa and the land, the program helps Māori reconnect with their cultural roots and traditional approaches to food production.”

## An example of a food sovereignty initiative in the East Coast

**Nāti Kai** are a collective of three vegetable growers, collaborating with a small network of partner growers in Te Tairāwhiti. Together they are changing the way kai is grown and accessed up and down the East coast. They aim to connect whānau back to the whenua (land) through a weekly kai box produced locally.



Community Group weekly session at He Waka Tapu, Christchurch

## Conclusion

The name of the fund (Putā Ora) refers to concepts of wellbeing and nurturing that comes from growing food and doing the work - **kōia te māra, ka puta te ora (dig the garden to bring health into view).**

These were the intentions of this fund. Initiatives are gaining momentum and we expect that further insights on the outcomes of Putā Ora funding be available in mid-2024 when reports are received on completion of the fund.

