

# Re-localising Our Food

Reshaping Northland's food production,  
distribution and consumption systems



*Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou  
ka ora ai te iwi.*

*With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.*

## *Friends of the Northland Local Food Network*



NNFC

Fresh Food Collective

Wholefood Hub



Audit Assistant



TRANSITION TOWNS



We thank these organisation for their support and advice in our quest to formalise the establishment of a local food movement in Te Tai Tokerau.

*E tu kahikatea Hei whakapae ururoa*

*Awhi mai awhi atu tatou tatou e*

*Stand like the kahikatea to brave the storms.  
Embrace one another. We are one together*

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## Introduction

Northland's food systems are unsustainable. The number of locals growing produce has been decimated over the last three decades as the supermarkets have consolidated their domination of the supply chain. Especially in rural areas, those that don't grow their own food often have to travel long distances to get reliable access to food. Meanwhile, the population relies increasingly on a diet of over-processed convenience foods that leaves them undernourished with consequent alarming rises in preventable disease. Even if these problems with distribution channels were reversed, the decline in the appetite for healthier foods, and skills for preparing it need also to be reversed. Sadly, this is taking place in a region that has among the most benign growing conditions on the planet, yet we have enabled systems to evolve that neither optimise local economies nor our health.

## The vision

To promote and establish community-led sustainable food systems for Northland. Systems that produce, add value, market and distribute locally grown nutritious food that supports the health and well-being of the community and the local economy while looking after the environment.

Why?

To contribute to a connected and cohesive, prosperous Northland by:

- building local resilience back into the Northland economy
- stemming the leakage of wealth from the region
- rebuilding local economies
- addressing food security and poverty at a community level
- providing and distributing healthy locally based fresh food at a community level through a range of channels
- enhancing employment opportunities at a local community level
- creating stronger supply and processing capability for value-add and export.

## Results/Outcomes:

Achieving food sovereignty: the phenomena of an engaged community of citizens determining a food system that satisfies its own interests and concerns through:

- the support of local growers, and providing them with fair returns for their skill

and labour

- repopulating declining rural communities, producing a new generation of growers to replace retiring growers
- stemming the flow of imported foods (that we can grow here) into the region,
- and increases our capacity to export and earn revenue with fresh and value added foods and products.

We envisage a healthier population that has access to food outlets providing healthier options supplemented with culinary and nutritional learning opportunities.

- Local cafes and restaurants will be proud and vocal champions of local food.
- New supply chains (co-ops and clusters for example) that create income and prosperity for the community and optimise health and wellbeing by supplying local, fresher, organic food at lower costs will continue to grow.

## Methodology

Over the last 2 years a series of workshops, discussions and overseas research trips involving a range of local organisations and individuals have explored options for strengthening Northland's food systems. Alongside these discussions, several initiatives have arisen as further foundations for change. This document outlines the next stage of this collaboration, including the creation of a formal guiding coalition and governance structure and securing resources to accelerate community and economic growth in this area.

It is our intention to call a meeting to further these aims. As an invited participant please consider the following questions.

1. How do you see your organisation being involved, supporting and benefitting from the further development of a local food movement?
2. What other organisations and stakeholders do you see assisting in this development?
3. Are you able to speak on behalf of your organisation's support for the further development of a local food movement?

## Guiding principles

The collaboration to date has emphasised the following foundation principles for the design of a local resilient food system.

- We collaborate to achieve sustainable outcomes.

- We share a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed actions.
- We collect data and measure results consistently across all participants ensuring shared measurement for alignment and accountability.
- Our communication is open, transparent and honours all perspectives and opinions resulting in:
  - emergence of a collective partnership vision,
  - sense of empowerment and accomplishment among participants,
  - responsiveness to challenges and demonstration of adaption and implementation of new processes and structures, and
  - creates common motivation amongst the diverse players.
- We establish a social enterprise with appropriate governance and asset locks to best serve a system that aspires to support local needs while operating on enterprise values.
- We utilise the capabilities of the Internet to support innovation.

## Existing initiatives and opportunities

There are a number of initiatives that predated this collaboration or have sprung up alongside it. The examples presented here provide an early picture of what our evolving food systems look like. They provide evidence of a positive move toward a huge opportunity for positive change.

***The growth of growers markets:*** Growers and farmers markets are increasing in Northland. The ***Whangarei Growers Market*** is a remarkable success story. It has a loyal and growing customer base who resonate with the market's values. It has provided a number of producers with a valuable customer base and links to wholesale customers. In the last year, the design of this market has been replicated in Kerikeri and Kaitia with another new market planned in Kaikohe.

***Northland Natural Food Coop:*** Sean Stanley has established a peer-to-peer produce market mediated through a website. This innovation reduces the administrative costs and layers aligned with distribution systems. Sean is focussed on organic local suppliers with his initiative providing a catalyst for scaling production.

***Fresh Food Collective:*** In late 2014 Laura Cates established a food coop that has reduced the cost of produce for participants. She has 900 customers at present and that number will grow, as will her distribution network.

**Pehiaweri Marae:** Activity around Pehiaweri Marae is increasing exponentially. Part of their developments are community gardens and orchards and educational activities related to food production. Pehiaweri will continue to develop as a social and economic hub and could serve as a model for 100 marae around Te Tai Tokerau.

**Resilient Economies Conference:** In 2013 the Far North District Council hosted the *Resilient Economies Conference*. Local food systems were a significant part of the proceedings. This signalled a significant shift in Local Government discourse around social and economic development.

**Akina/FNDC Social enterprise scholarship program:** This four month scholarship program (May to August) is designed for individuals and teams to explore new ideas and learn how to create and promote successful social enterprises. Numerous social enterprises are being developed around local food systems.

**The Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) programme:** NorthTec's SRD (Sustainable Rural Development) programme has established horticultural training at diverse locations. The programme has now evolved to offer training at the enterprise level as well as the basics of vegetable growing.

The above examples illustrate that distribution channels are both innovating and diversifying. But also re-establishing and growing Northland's production capability is the most pressing short to medium term challenge.

## Opportunities

We are thus well positioned to further link up the initiatives highlighted above and to support them and others with infrastructural design for a 21st century food system. The components include:

**Production systems** that support and ensure new growers are educated and trained and have adequate start up resources (e.g. microfinancing, loans, mentoring and apprenticeships) to move into production after graduation.

**Distribution systems** that:

- support and complement Farmer's/Grower's markets (Kaitaia, Kerikeri, Whangarei and Kaikohe (still to be established))
- supports food-hub, food co-op, and marae based food distribution systems

- ensures food poverty is ameliorated and ideally eliminated (Food for life, Salvation Army, Soul Food)
- ensures food waste is recycled and composted
- ensures food security by reducing dependence on vulnerable road networks and long supply chains
- serves diverse markets, from those less mobile and impoverished to gourmet foodies, and restaurateurs both here and out of the region.

Ethical access to produce (for example FairTrade) not able to be grown here is another consideration.

• **Processing facilities** to add value to Northland products and surplus production.

• **Knowledge, research and education systems** to connect the diverse components and create synergies around:

- relationships and partnerships between educational training institutions and local food movement to ensure continuity of new growers replacing older retiring growers
- cooking and food preparation demonstrations focusing on health, food vitality and nutrition
- small business mentoring for new start-up businesses focusing on value added product development and promotion, and
- marketing, and food safety mentoring and training to support new value added product development and further food processing.

• **Food hubs** are centrally located facilities that facilitate the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products<sup>1</sup>. Food hubs can be established in population centres around Northland. Functions could include:

- food aggregation and distribution with cool storage facilities
- production kitchens
- healthy eating promotions, food coaches and food donations
- advisory facilities for farmers and growers
- retail facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> from *Imagining a Casey Food Hub*, Eaterprises, <http://www.eaterprises.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/110923-Casey-Food-Hub-Concepts.pdf>

## Social Enterprise model

Social enterprise occupies a space between commercial enterprise/profit motivated and not-for-profits/charity.

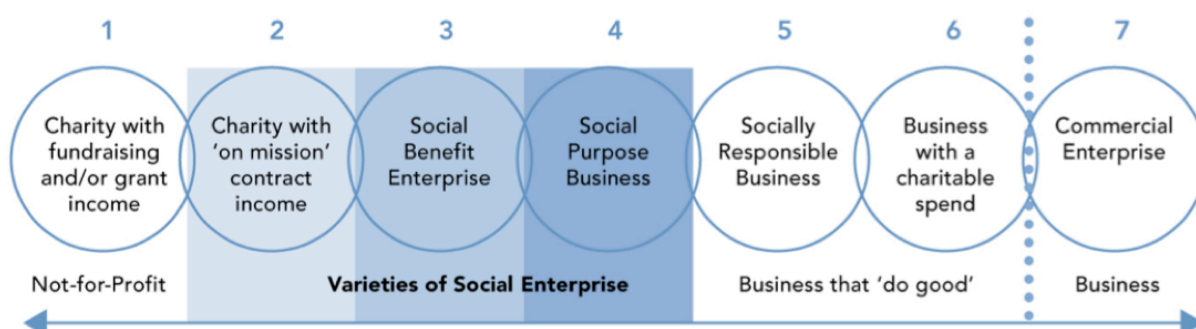


Figure 1: The enterprise continuum<sup>2</sup>

Social enterprises are typically established with a strong social and/or environmental purpose. They have asset locks that reinvest surpluses or channel them transparently back into the social or environmental outcomes they are wanting to achieve. We envisage a governance entity set up to conform with social enterprise design.

## Benefits

### Partnership

In the first half of the 19th Century colonialists often depended on Maori for the provision of food. Maori quickly mastered the husbandry of new crops and farming methods. The subsequent impact of colonisation drove that capability underground and in the 20th century Maori were mostly excluded from control of the means of production. Redesigning our food systems together offer an opportunity for true partnership. Maori can fully participate in production, distribution, processing and knowledge systems to co-create our new food system. The network of marae can rediscover their vibrant role in community social and economic activity. Unlike centralised distribution systems, marae are found in every rural community, being even more ubiquitous than Post Offices used to be.

<sup>2</sup> Kaplan, M. (2103) *Growing the next generation of social entrepreneurs and start-ups in New Zealand*. An Ian Axford Fellowship policy report. Retrieved from [http://www.fulbright.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/axford2013\\_kaplan.pdf](http://www.fulbright.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/axford2013_kaplan.pdf)

## **Economic benefits**

Northland's economy has been described as a haemophiliac economy. It bleeds out financial resources and needs frequent infusions. The economic advantages of a well-designed local food system are significant. This is now being substantiated worldwide, as well with our local grower's/ farmer's markets.

### **1. Produce consumed**

The average New Zealand household spent \$22.60 per week on fruit and vegetables in 2013.<sup>3</sup> If we extrapolate this out to regional consumption based on the number of households, Northlanders spend \$69 million annually. Some of this is produce that cannot be grown here, but equally, we are also exporters of produce such as kumara and kiwifruit, avocados and citrus. If we include the \$27.90 spent weekly on meat, poultry and fish, and \$15.20 on milk, cheese and eggs, consumption of foods that can be produced locally is over \$200 million.

The current centralised distribution system through supermarkets and supporting national food hubs, sees a good proportion of this quantum distributed to out-of-region growers, distributors and retailers.

We are not advocating for not trading outside the region but we need to trade from a position of strength. A much greater proportion of the money spent on these food items could be retained to circulate more through the local economy. With increased production and value added product development Northland could start to supply more of the local market initially then expand into further exports.

### **2. Employment**

As we rebuild our capacity to produce our own food and support a stronger export capability, jobs will be created. Perhaps more importantly, these jobs will be distributed across the region in a manner that few other industries can replicate. These jobs will be created in food production, value added product development, transport, support services, tourism etc.

### **3. Exports**

Increasing our local food system infrastructure will ultimately increase our ability both to export and to add value to food through processing.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from table 8 of the Household Economic Survey June 2013 spreadsheet accessed from the [Statistics New Zealand website](#). The full table provides explanatory notes.

#### 4. Reducing the health and social cost burden

Between 33 and 36.1% of Northlanders are obese<sup>4</sup>. Improved access to fresh produce through improved distribution, reduced costs and enhancing home, school, marae and community gardens, coupled with better awareness of nutrition will improve health, both from both an economic and social perspective. This NZIER/Superu diagramme surfaces the multiple sociocultural impacts of obesity and the economic consequences.

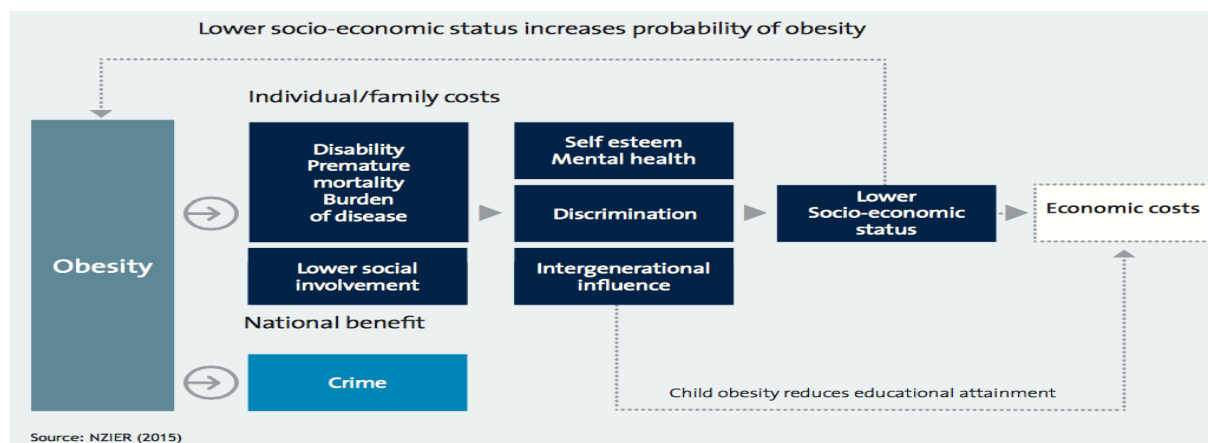


Figure 2: Socioeconomic impacts of obesity<sup>5</sup>

The NZIER/Superu report outlines the various economic consequences of high levels of obesity, but does not present an aggregated figure. However, in broader discourse, just one of the associated health issues, the increasing prevalence of diabetes, is characterised as a tsunami, and associated health costs are spoken of in billions of dollars.

### Social and cultural benefits

#### Health

The health issues outlined above have significant sociocultural impacts. Conversely, creating a food movement whose guiding aspirations include enhanced access to fresh produce and related educational initiatives will help promote better health.

<sup>4</sup> from *Obesity and Diabetes in New Zealand*. Retrieved from <http://www.parliament.nz/enz/parlsupport/researchpapers/00PLLawRP2014041/obesityanddiabetesinnewzealand>

<sup>5</sup> *The wider economic and social costs of obesity: A discussion of the nonhealth impacts of obesity in New Zealand*. Retrieved from [http://www.superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Obesity\\_summary\\_report.pdf](http://www.superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Obesity_summary_report.pdf)

**Farm to hospital**

A recent decision by the Northland District Health Board to not accept frozen hospital meals from Auckland opens up opportunities for the hospital to source fresher healthier food from local sources. This type of initiative will result in better hospital nutritional meals, contribute to the local economy and retain much needed jobs.

**Employment**

Growing the production, distribution and processing base will generate employment opportunities. For example, *The Social and Economic Impact of the Whangarei Growers Market* report identifies 90 full time equivalent (ftes) jobs generated by the market. The economic analysis identified a further 22 ftes flowing on from backward and forward linkages.<sup>6</sup>

**Food security**

Our increasing reliance on food imported into the region reduces our food security. Recent road closures highlight this problem, especially for the Far North District.<sup>7</sup>

**A sense of place**

*The Social and Economic Impact of the Whangarei Growers Market* report also identified the importance of such facilities as a community asset, visitor attraction, providing “atmosphere” and enhancing community life. One family surveyed for the report identified the market as one of the reasons they moved into Northland. The markets and other initiatives identified earlier help to reinforce a sense of community and place.

**Environmental benefits**

Demand is growing for organic, spray free, soil grown produce as evidenced by consumer awareness. While our capacity for growing conventional produce has been compromised, our capacity to meet a growing demand for organic produce is a still greater challenge. However as more organic produce is produced there are subsequent reductions in the importation of pesticides and fertilisers.

Substituting produce imported into the region also reduces transport costs, and attendant CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

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<sup>6</sup> from *The Social and Economic Impact of the Whangarei Growers Market*. Retrieved from <http://peterbruce.co.nz/research-2/research-documents/>

<sup>7</sup> from *Food (in)Security in the Far North*, Ken Ross

## Measuring sustainability

To measure the success of the social enterprises associated with this project we will need clear operating assumptions and robust baseline information that:

- allows integrated monitoring of not only economic indicators, but also measures social, cultural and environmental indicators.
- can describe and demonstrate how the social enterprises are good for people, communities, the local economy and the environment
- recognizes the true worth and public benefits arising from Northland's biodiversity values and ecosystem services to Northland's social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

## The pathway

Our next steps are to consider a governance structure and resourcing needs. The local food movement will be further developed by the incubation of small commercial or social enterprise businesses and community initiatives. These will benefit from a guiding coalition and governance structure to support knowledge and resource requirements.

### *A governance structure*

The local food movement requires a governance structure to:

- support the ongoing system design, collaboration and growth
- provide physical and virtual venues for development discourse and connectivity, especially between the diverse interests of, for example, growers and health professionals
- develop a knowledge base for resource needs including land and capital, research and development and production knowledge
- generate funding opportunities and enable taxfree donations.

A key task is to identify the best entity to achieve these objectives.

### *A model for regional development?*

With Northland's unique climatic and cultural advantages and spurred by our underperformance, we are creating a localised food system that is a model of social and economic development.

## ***Funding***

The establishment of a governance structure will enable the pursuit of funding for activities such as infrastructural support, stakeholder database/website development, research and enabling communication.

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