He kai kei aku ringa
There is food in my hands

Community Report

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS ON MĀNGERE FOOD SYSTEMS FOR BETTER POLICIES

October 2025
Prepared by Moana Connect and Toi Tangata

Acknowledgements

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We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many community groups and organisations who participated in this kaupapa. Your generous sharing of time, stories, and lived experience helped us understand the incredible mahi already happening across Māngere, the challenges that whānau and communities continue to face when trying to access healthy food, and the pathways we can walk together toward food sovereignty. Your voices have shaped this report and will continue to guide the next steps. Moana Connect and Toi Tangata also acknowledge the support and collaboration of Healthy Families South Auckland, and Waipapa Taumata Rau (the University of Auckland). Your expertise has been vital in ensuring this work is robust, relational, and grounded in community knowledge. We thank especially Dr David Rees for his leadership and development of the systems maps and Dr Fa'asisila Savila of Waipapa Taumata Rau for funding the design of this report.

Koha Café at Papatūānuku Marae, Māngere East
The café creates a variety of offerings from surplus food, including cooked meals, baked goods, and everyday café favourites. All food scraps are composted to grow fresh produce in the māra, supporting a sustainable and circular food system for the community

Executive Summary

He kai kei aku ringa

This whakataukī translates literally as 'there is food in my hands', which speaks to food access, but also inspires a broader understanding of sovereignty, capability and collective success. When the initial call was made to explore food systems, food security and food sovereignty in South Auckland with a focus on Māngere, it was vital that the search acknowledged the importance of local and collective leadership and ownership of this work.

This report presents the findings of the Māngere Food Systems Policy Project, a community-led initiative aimed at transforming food systems in South Auckland through policy advocacy, systems thinking, and indigenous knowledge. Initiated by a collaborative facilitated by Health Coalition Aotearoa – Moana Connect, Toi Tangata, Healthy Families South Auckland, and the University of Auckland – the project's design was aimed at centring the voices of local stakeholders, community groups and grassroots organisations who work closely with whānau.

Purpose and Approach

The project sought to understand the systemic barriers to food access, affordability, and sovereignty in Māngere, and to identify policy levers that support community-led solutions. Using kaupapa Māori and Pacific methodologies, the team conducted talanoa interviews, cognitive and systems mapping, and a community validation workshop. The approach was relational, inclusive, and grounded in cultural values.

Key Findings

Food Insecurity and Affordability:
Many whānau face significant barriers to accessing nutritious, culturally appropriate kai due to low incomes, high living costs, and the dominance of convenience, fast-food outlets. School lunch programmes like Ka Ora, Ka Ako have made a positive impact, reducing stigma and improving student wellbeing. Food banks have also ensured access for whānau; however, structural and systemic challenges make it hard for some families to access nutritious food.

Revival of Indigenous Knowledge and Practices:
Community groups are actively reviving mātauranga Māori and Pacific food practices through māra kai, wānanga, and intergenerational learning. Initiatives such as Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra, Whenua Warrior and MANAVA demonstrate the transformative power of reconnecting with whenua and kai.

Local Initiatives and Innovation:
Organisations such as I AM Māngere, Tatou Social Supermarket, and Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae are leading innovative responses to food insecurity, combining cultural knowledge with practical support. This is not an exhaustive list as Māngere is home to multiple examples of effective and potential approaches that can elevate strengths, create employment and contribute to a sustainable food system in Māngere. However, they face challenges including funding instability, regulatory barriers, and limited land access.

Systems Mapping and Policy Levers:
Many parts of the system are connected and inter-related. A systems map was developed to identify feedback loops and leverage points across six themes: local food systems, community capacity, household economics, industrial food systems, school food, and food consumption. While these themes are applicable anywhere in the world, what these look like in action, and the dynamics and relationships within local settings can be unique to that community, as described in this report. These insights informed an initial community consultation on potential actions and a set of proposed policy interventions.

Policy Recommendations

Policy levers have been identified in all aspects of the Māngere food system. In summary, the following areas are crucial:

- Enable urban farming and community gardens through Auckland Unitary Plan reforms.
- Support social enterprises and co-operative food models with tailored legal structures.
- Strengthen the Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme with local procurement and sustained funding.
- Regulate fast-food outlet density and advertising near schools.
- Address poverty and food affordability through national policy levers such as tax reform and living wage initiatives.

Next Steps

The South Auckland Food Policy Project (SAFPP) is entering a pivotal phase focused on validating findings with Māngere whānau and hapori, strengthening relationships, and mobilising collective action for policy change. Late 2025 will prioritise sharing and validation through hui and community engagement, while laying the groundwork for a community-led collective to guide decisions. From late 2025 to early 2026, this group will identify key policy priorities based on impact and local values and co-designing advocacy strategies for improving local food access and sovereignty. By early to mid-2026, agreed priorities will be activated with backbone support from the SAFPP Steering Group, aiming to create a movement rooted in whakapapa, mana motuhake, and the right to nourish our people.

Conclusion

The Māngere community holds deep knowledge and leadership in food systems transformation. This report celebrates existing mahi, identifies systemic barriers, and proposes actionable pathways toward food sovereignty. It calls for sustained investment, policy reform, and recognition of Indigenous and Pacific approaches to kai, whenua, and wellbeing.

Māngere Saturday Markets: Community shoppers picking fresh fruit and vegetables
The markets offer a wide range of fresh fruit and vegetables, Pacific Island kai, clothing, crafts, home essentials, and more. Supporting local growers and small businesses while providing affordable kai and goods for the community.

Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Awa	(te reo Māori) river
Hapori	(te reo Māori) community or section of a kinship group
Hauora	(te reo Māori) health, wellbeing, vigour
Hua Parakore	(te reo Māori) A kaupapa Māori system and framework for growing kai based on the principles of Whakapapa, Wairua, Mana, Māramatanga, Te Ao Tūroa, and Mauri
Iwi	(te reo Māori) tribe, often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory
Kai	(te reo Māori) food, meal, to eat, consume, or feed oneself
Ka Ora, Ka Ako	(te reo Māori) government-funded school lunch programme aimed at improving child nutrition
Kaimahi	(te reo Māori) worker, employee
Kaumātua	(te reo Māori) elder, elderly man, elderly woman, old man - a person of status within the whānau
Kaitiakitanga	(te reo Māori) guardianship, stewardship
Kaupapa	(te reo Māori) topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative
Kaupapa Māori	(te reo Māori) Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology - a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society
Kōhanga	(te reo Māori) nest, nursery, often a shorten form of Te Kōhanga Reo which is a Māori language preschool or early childhood centre
Koha	(te reo Māori) gift, present, offering, donation, contribution - especially one maintaining social relationships and has connotations of reciprocity
Kura	(te reo Māori) school, education, learning gathering
Mahinga kai	(te reo Māori) traditional Māori practices for gathering food resoruces
Mana	(multiple Moana languages) prestige, influence, authority
Mana motuhake	(te reo Māori) autonomy, self-government, self-determination, independence, sovereignty, authority - mana through self-determination and control over one's own destiny
Manaakitanga	(te reo Māori) hospitality, kindness, generosity, support - the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others
Māra/Māra kai	(te reo Māori) garden, cultivation/food garden
Māramatanga	(te reo Māori)understanding, enlightenment
Maramataka	(te reo Māori) Māori lunar calendar, calendar - a planting and fishing monthly almanac
Mātauranga Māori	(te reo Māori) Māori knowledge - the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices
Mauri	(te reo Māori) life principle, life force, essence
Mea'ai	(Samoan) food
Papatūānuku	(te reo Māori) Earth mother, and wife of Rangi-nui - all living things originate from them
Pasifika	A term that collectively refers to the diverse Pacific peoples of Aotearoa, and their family networks
Rākau	(te reo Māori) tree, stick, timber, wood, spar, mast, plant - not normally used before the names of trees or plants
Rangatiratanga	(te reo Māori) chieftainship, right to exercise authority, chiefly autonomy, chiefly authority, ownership, leadership of a social group, domain of the rangatira, noble birth, attributes of a chief, kingdom, realm, sovereignty, principality, self-determination, self-management - connotations extending the original meaning of the word
Ringa atawhai	(te reo Māori) caring hands; those who serve and support others, often used to describe community workers
Taiao	(te reo Māori) natural world, environment, nature
Talanoa	(multiple Moana languages) to talk or converse freely, to talk or converse until a state of balance is achieved
Tamariki	(te reo Māori) children
Tinana	(te reo Māori) body, torso, main part of anything
Tino rangatiratanga	(te reo Māori) self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government, domination, rule, control, power
Tohu taiao	(te reo Māori) environmental signs or indicators used to guide decisions and practices
Tūroa	(te reo Māori) established, of long standing, enduring, long-lasting
Wairua	(te reo Māori) spirit, soul - spirit of a person which exists beyond death. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the mauri
Wānanga	(te reo Māori) seminar, conference, forum, to meet and discuss a specific kaupapa or topic
Whakapapa	(te reo Māori) genealogy, lineage
Whānau	(te reo Māori) extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society
Whenua	(te reo Māori) land, placenta - expressing the deep connection between people and land

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Introduction

This community report presents the findings from the first phase of the Māngere Food Systems Policy Project; a kaupapa that seeks to support advocacy and action that is grounded in the lived experiences, aspirations, and leadership of our whānau, hapori, and local communities. This report complements the project's foundational report 'Understanding food systems in South Auckland'[1]. Led by a collective including Toi Tangata, Moana Connect, Healthy Families South Auckland, Health Coalition Aotearoa, and the University of Auckland, this mahi was shaped by kaupapa Māori and Pacific research approaches, systems thinking, and a commitment to meaningful community engagement.

The purpose of this report is to give back to the many groups and individuals who contributed their time, stories, and insights. Through talanoa, workshops, and collaborative mapping, we've built a shared understanding of the food systems in Māngere to inform the next stages of policy advocacy and change. This document is not just a summary of research; it is a celebration of the incredible work already happening in our communities, and a reflection of the collective wisdom that guides us.

We acknowledge the generosity of those who participated, and we want to honour your mahi and whakaaro by presenting these findings back to you in in ways that are respectful, grounded in your experiences, and useful to your ongoing work. We – as a community – have a vital role to play, not just in responding to the system, but in leading its transformation. We don't need to wait for policy to catch up; we already hold the knowledge, relationships, and power to move quickly. Our hope is that this report will celebrate what's being done, support continued action and further advocacy, and strengthen local initiatives by helping us walk together toward a future where nourishing kai is within reach for everyone.

Why did we undertake this project?

Access to good nutrition is determined by multiple factors across the food system, often influenced by systemic, cultural and economic challenges. Furthermore, while many community-led food initiatives exist across Aotearoa, they can be constrained by a policy and regulatory environment that favours commercial interests over community wellbeing.

This project was undertaken to explore and improve the food environments in South Auckland, particularly in Māngere, by understanding the systemic factors and policy change required to influence food access, affordability and sovereignty. By having a better understanding of local policy levers for change, more can be done to ensure community-led, culturally grounded solutions; especially those led by mana whenua, tangata whenua, and Pacific communities.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Enable community-led policy design, led by mana whenua and tangata whenua
- Define and agree on policy actions to improve food environments
- Build capacity and alliances for a collective advocacy campaign
- Secure funding and evaluate the campaign
- Share learnings nationally to influence central government

This project was born from the recognition that our Māngere communities hold deep knowledge about what nourishes us - not just physically, but culturally, spiritually, and collectively. Food insecurity and systemic barriers are felt daily here; however, whānau and community groups have long been leading solutions grounded in mātauranga Māori, and the knowledge and ways of life shared by Pasifika communities. Mapping the local food system required local community voices to support existing evidence of policy levers that support local food sovereignty. This project responds to a wider call for structural change, where community-led initiatives are resourced, respected, and reflected in decision-making.

Healthy Families New Zealand uses the Six Conditions of Systems Change framework to identify and work on the conditions that can be influenced to address complex health issues (Figure 1 - Healthy Families New Zealand, 2022). This project helps to inform the improvement of 'Policies – rules, regulations and priorities (informal and formal) that guide action'.

1 Health Coalition Aotearoa. (2026). He kai kei aku ringa – There is food is in my hands: Foundation report. https://www.healthcoalition.org.nz

Six Conditions of Systems Change

Healthy Families NZ enables community-led change through the Six Conditions of Systems Change. These six interdependent conditions are what hold problems in place, and also what enable a problem to be resolved through systemic disruption.

Some Conditions are explicit and obvious, and some are more implicit and harder to see. Each provides a focus area that can inform the development of change strategies and system interventions.

The stories that follow in this Impact Report highlight change within these different and interconnected Conditions of Systems Change. Some of the longer stories look at all six, while the shorter stories tend to highlight one or two areas of change.

We recognise that successful systems change requires focus and movement within all of these Conditions, and these stories are shared to highlight what this movement can look like around Aotearoa.

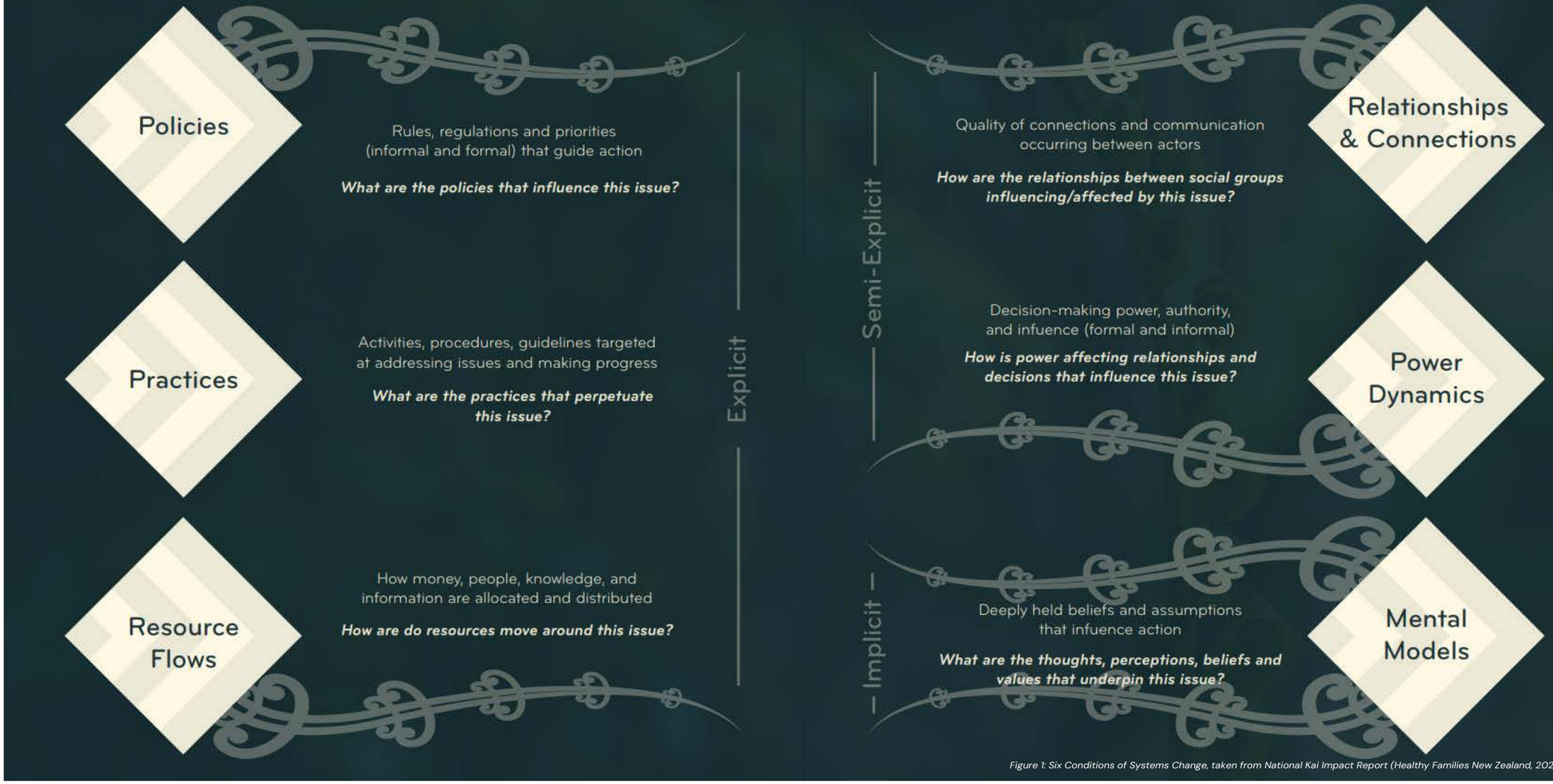


Figure 1: Six Conditions of Systems Change, taken from National Kai Impact Report (Healthy Families New Zealand, 2022)

About "Food Systems"

A food system includes everything involved in feeding our people, from growing and harvesting to how food is shared, consumed, and how waste is managed. In Māngere, our food system is shaped by local initiatives, cultural practices, economic pressures, and the policies that govern access to land, resources, and kai. Looking at food through a systems lens helps us see how these elements are connected. Food insecurity isn't just about what's available, it's also about income, housing, transport, time, and knowledge. Systems thinking and mapping help us identify barriers, feedback loops, and opportunities for change, showing where we can intervene to support food sovereignty and wellbeing.

In Māngere – and throughout Aotearoa – the dominant industrial food system is motivated by profit and export. In our community, fast-food outlets outnumber fresh food outlets, and many whānau face high costs, limited transport, and restricted access to healthy and culturally appropriate kai. These conditions contribute to poor health outcomes and disconnect us from traditional food knowledge and practices.

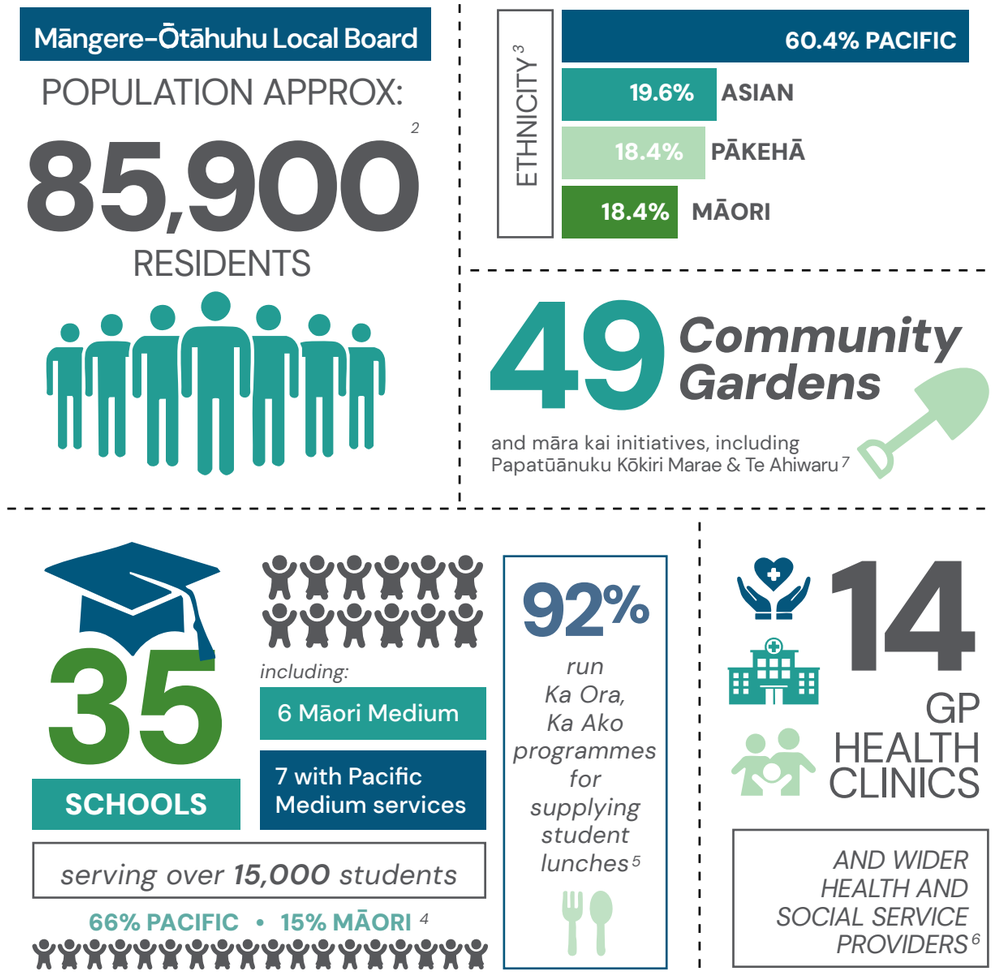
Understanding food systems is about reclaiming them. Unpacking concepts such as 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' to understand what this looks like at localised and micro settings can help to identify policy levers that can promote realistic and sustainable approaches to food access and nutrition. Healthy Families South Auckland developed the 'Good Food Road Map' (see Figure 2) which outlines a high-level theory of change for moving from food insecurity to security, and dependence to sovereignty.

Local community groups and organisations have an equally vital role to play; while policy and systems change take time, our communities are already leading. They hold the knowledge, the relationships, and the power to move quickly.

The stories and insights shared in this report show that change is already happening in Māngere, through gardens, food hubs, wānanga, and whānau-led initiatives. These examples highlight strengths we can build on, relationships we can deepen, and solutions we can scale.

Māngere

Māngere is a vibrant and diverse community in South Auckland; it is home to Te Ākitai Waiohua, Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Te Ata, Ngāti Tamaoho, Ngāti Maru, Te Kawerau ā Maki, Ngāti Tamaterā, and Ngāti Tai ki Tāmaki, as well as being a recognised hub for Pacific peoples in Auckland. The area is characterised by strong cultural identity, community networks, and a rich history of grassroots initiatives. However, it also faces systemic challenges including high rates of food insecurity, limited access to affordable healthy food, and a disproportionate presence of fast-food outlets.



2 Tatauranga Aotearoa/Stats NZ. (n.d.). Place and ethnic group summaries: Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board Area. Wellington, New Zealand: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa/the New Zealand Government. https://tools.summaries.stats.govt.nz/places/TA/Māngere-Ōtāhuhu-local-board-area
3 Ibid
4 Education Counts. (2025). Auckland- Māngere-Ōtāhuhu. Wellington, New Zealand: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa/the New Zealand Government. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/know-your-region/territorial-authority/territorial-authority-summary region=2&district=7617
5 Internal data provided by Healthy Families South Auckland
6 Healthpoint. (2025). South Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand: Healthpoint Limited. https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/south-auckland/
7 Internal data provided by Healthy Families South Auckland

The Good Food Road Map

The Good Food Road Map has been developed by Healthy Families NZ and is being adopted by Healthy Families teams, Councils, organisations and community groups around the country as a framework to inform the transition to sustainable and resilient local food systems.

The Good Food Road Map encourages consistency in approach, efficient use of resources, and collaboration for collective impact. This framework can guide you, your communities and your organisations as you plan your own course of action.

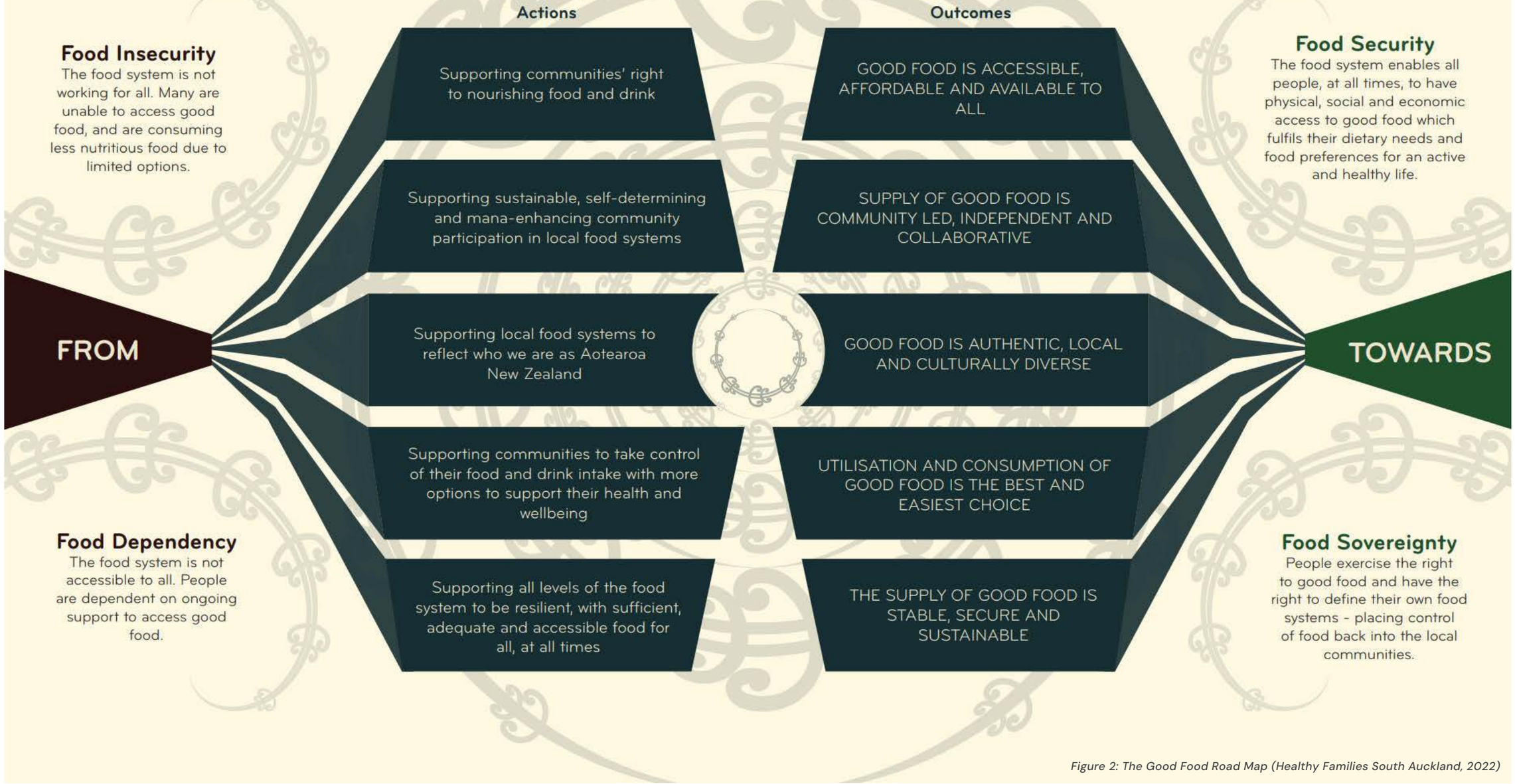


Figure 2: The Good Food Road Map (Healthy Families South Auckland, 2022)

Approach

The Māngere Food Systems Mapping Project set out to centre the voices, experiences, and leadership of our key stakeholders, community and grassroots groups who work with whānau. Our approach to data collection, and our analysis for this report, were grounded in kaupapa Māori and Pacific methodologies and deep community engagement. We wanted to understand the food system not just through data and systems science, but through lived realities, doing so in ways that honour our relationships, our knowledge, and our collective aspirations.

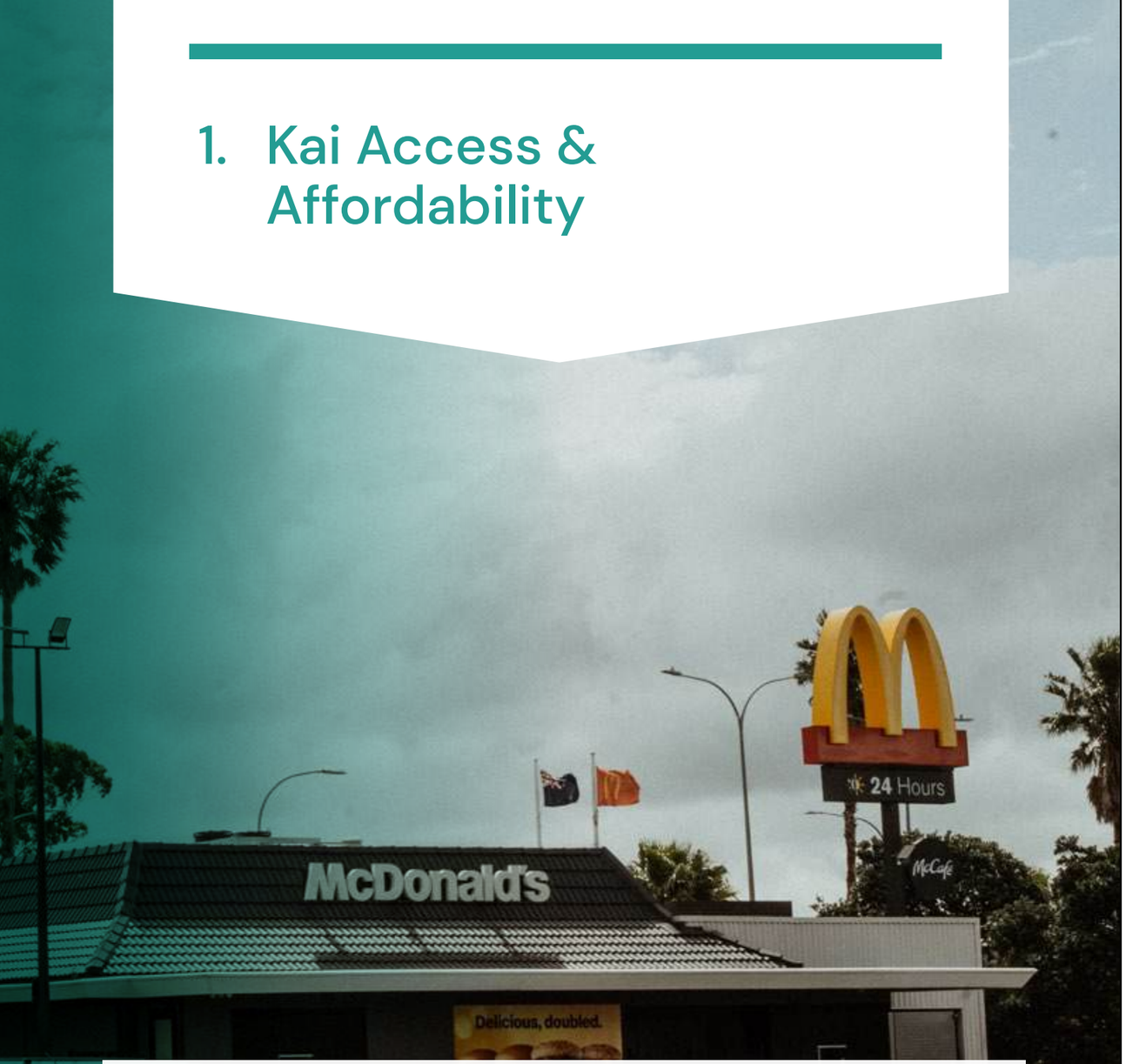
What we did

The project unfolded in three interconnected phases:

1. **Preparation and Scoping**
   We secured ethics approval through the Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee, developed a shared workplan, and mapped key stakeholders across Māngere's food ecosystem to ensure diverse representation.
2. **Mapping and Planning**
   Moana Connect – in partnership with Toi Tangata – led 15 talanoa interviews with community leaders including school principals, marae and iwi representatives, church ministers, health providers, climate advocates, and council planners. These talanoa explored food access, affordability, cultural practices, and systemic barriers. From these, the research team developed cognitive, and systems maps to visualise relationships and feedback loops within Māngere's local food system.
   We used culturally embedded and participatory methods throughout. Talanoa[8],[9] – a Pacific approach to interpersonal, qualitative research – honoured relationality, respect, and reciprocity, allowing participants to speak freely and safely. These were analysed using the Tivaevae framework[10], a Cook Islands methodology that reflects collective meaning-making and layered insight.
   Cognitive mapping helped to visualise how people understand food insecurity in their own lives and communities. These maps were built using Kumu software and refined through collaborative workshops. Systems mapping then built on these to identify leverage points and systemic drivers of change.
3. **Validation and Consolidation**
   In July 2025, the research team held a community workshop at Māngere Central Community Hall to share findings, gather feedback, and co-design future actions. The workshop brought together groups such as I AM Māngere, Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae, Food Hub Collective, CIDANZ, and others. Their insights, alongside the talanoa results, will guide the next phase of advocacy and action. The community workshop provided a space for collective sensemaking and mobilisation. Participants reviewed systems maps, discussed priorities, and identified policy levers and community-led interventions. The process was designed to be inclusive, empowering, and grounded in Indigenous and Pacific worldviews.

8 Vaioleti, T. (2006). Talanoa Research Methodology: Developing a Pacific Perspective on Research. Waikato Journal of Education, 12(21-35), 21-35.
9 Vaioleti, T. M. (2013, 2013/01/01/). Talanoa: Differentiating the Talanoa Research Methodology from phenomenology, narrative, Kaupapa Māori and feminist methodologies. Te Reo, 56/57, 191-212
10 Futter-Puati, D., & Maua-Hodges, T. (2019). Stitching Tivaevae: a Cook Islands research method. AlterNative, 00(0), 1-10.

1. Kai Access & Affordability



Access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food is a cornerstone of community wellbeing, yet in Māngere, many whānau face significant barriers to achieving food security. The South Auckland food system is shaped by a complex web of factors including economic pressures, limited access to land, the dominance of industrial food systems, and systemic policy constraints that collectively impact what food is available, affordable, and consumed.

For many households, the high cost of healthy food, coupled with low incomes and time scarcity, forces difficult choices that often result in reliance on cheaper, ultra-processed foods. This section summarises talanoa findings related kai access and affordability in Māngere.

Fast Food Outlets and Dairies Are Common Across Māngere

In Māngere, fast food outlets and dairies are a highly visible and accessible part of the local food environment. Their prevalence reflects a broader pattern of food system inequities, where unhealthy, ultra-processed foods are more readily available and affordable than fresh, nutritious options. Community members have described the area as a "free-for-all sugar factory," highlighting the saturation of fast food and convenience stores in residential neighbourhoods. This overconcentration of unhealthy food outlets is not incidental: it is a systemic issue shaped by zoning policies, commercial priorities, and a lack of regulatory tools to limit their density or proximity to schools.

Usually located near schools, bus stops, shopping centres and busy roads, these outlets offer low-cost, quick meals that suit busy schedules, but the food is often highly processed and low in nutritional value. For many whānau, these options are part of everyday life. Community members are acutely aware of the systemic nature of this issue:

> **For example, just on Massey road, we have two KFC placed together, and there are only two residential houses apart, and I feel that we are a target of major fast food companies, because it's not that our people are stupid or anything, but they know that our people are likely to buy these because it's a lot cheaper they can sort of buy fresh fruit and vegetables."**
>
> *– FS_3, Church community leader*

Local schools are limited in their ability to shield tamariki from the constant exposure to unhealthy food options, especially when these outlets are embedded in the daily routes of children and young people.

> **We can't control what happens across the road at the local dairy. We, uh except during the day, you know, not letting students out to go to the dairy during break times. So that's a school policy which has always been that way. But before and after school, it's a free for all sugar factory."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary School Principal*

Supermarkets and produce stores are not evenly spread across Māngere, and transport to these stores can be a barrier for households without a car. Public transport may not always be reliable or practical for grocery shopping, especially for older adults, families with young children, or those buying for larger households. Smaller shops and dairies may be closer to home, but they often sell packaged goods with limited fresh produce or culturally preferred ingredients.

> **It just makes no sense for there not to be a supermarket there where people can access food straight away, and they're not having to go to, you know, some of these dodgy shops that just charge crazy prices. And the Dairies are dairies right, they are there for convenience, you know, they're just up the road, so you pay a little bit more for convenience, but you're not supposed to be paying, man, it's like, sometimes twice the price that is in a supermarket. And for people who don't have a lot of money, they need access to that supermarket."**
>
> *– FS_9, Grocery sector*

Cost is a Significant Factor to Accessing Nutritious Kai

Even for working families, the rising cost of living, coupled with low wages and large household sizes, makes it difficult to consistently access nutritious food. As one community leader explained,

> **Even if our clients are working, they're working in the lower-paid jobs compared to the rest of New Zealand... We have bigger families. It's also multigenerational - mum and dad, grandkids, and grandma and granddad, potentially as well, in the same house."**
>
> *– FS_13, Local consultant*

Unexpected expenses often push families into food insecurity.

> **They just purchased sports gear, paid school fees, and now there's no money for food anymore... Car repairs are quite common as well. They pay for car tires—no money for food, so they come and shop here."**
>
> *– FS_13, Social Supermarket*

These financial shocks, even when temporary, can leave families without enough to eat. Fresh fruit, vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains are generally more expensive than processed or takeaway foods. Incomes in Māngere are lower than the Auckland average, and many whānau live in rental housing. Multigenerational households are common, and feeding a large number of people with healthy food can be expensive. Cost of living which includes housing, power, transport, and other essentials adds more financial pressure to whānau. Time also plays a role. Many people in Māngere work long hours or juggle multiple responsibilities, including caregiving and community involvement. This can make it hard to find time for shopping, cooking, and preparing meals. In these situations, convenience foods are the easiest option.

> **Think, you know, the cost of food is the main barrier to people getting good, nutritious food. It costs a lot more to eat healthy, yeah, you know, and that's a big problem for us. Yeah, it's still, you know, getting good money, but it's the amount of people we have in our household. Sometimes it's, yeah, it's not practical to be able to buy 10 whole bags of avocados."**
>
> *- FS_9, Food distribution*

These challenges are shaped by overlapping pressures economic, social, and environmental. Income, housing, transport, time, and food knowledge all influence how kai is accessed and used. These factors often interact. For example, limited time and transport may affect where people shop and what they buy, while changes in food knowledge may influence how meals are prepared at home. This reality reflects a broader pattern where economic hardship and time scarcity drive reliance on ultra-processed, low-nutrient foods that are more accessible and affordable than fresh, whole foods.

> **It's easier to buy high sugar, high carb food, then it is to buy natural kai. Your kai, that is your pumpkins and your potatoes and your veggies, your meats, but you can understand, if you can go and get a feed at a takeaway, and it's cheaper to purchase that than it is to grow your own kai. Another big one is whānau not growing their own kai."**
>
> *– FS_10, Local Healthcare provider*

11 Education Counts. (2025). Auckland- Māngere-Otahuhu. Wellington, New Zealand: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa/the New Zealand Government. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/know-your-region/territorial-authority/territorial-authority-summary?region=2&district=7617

12 Internal data provided by Healthy Families South Auckland

13 Ministry of Education – te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga. (2023). Kei ēhea kura a Ka Ora, Ka Ako? Which schools and kura have Ka Ora, Ka Ako Healthy School Lunches. Wellington, New Zealand: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa/the New Zealand Government. https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/available-assistance/which-schools-and-kura-have-ka-ora-ka-ako-healthy-school-lunches

School Lunches Make a Difference

Māngere has 35 schools – including 6 Māori medium schools and 7 that offer Pacific medium services. These schools serve over 15,000 of students. 66% of students in the area are Pacific, and 15% are Māori[11].

Almost all (92%) schools in Māngere participate in the Ka Ora, Ka Ako student lunch programme[12], an initiative established to address food insecurity and improve student wellbeing for schools in the top 25% of the Equity Index[13].

The universal nature of the programme has helped reduce stigma, which previously limited participation in initiatives such as breakfast clubs.

> **The problem with that (breakfast clubs) was stigma... people didn't want to show up. It was too public."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary Schools principal*

Ka Ora, Ka Ako has helped normalise food support and protect students from shame. The cultural importance of dignity and pride underscores the reluctance of students to accept targeted assistance.

> **I know that shame is a massive thing in Pacific Island culture... even yesterday, I was talking to a student about uniform and offering financial assistance. And I know they need it, but he can't accept it."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary Schools principal*

While the nutritional quality of the meals has been questioned, the consensus is that they are still healthier than what many students would otherwise eat.

> **Very few students before free lunches actually had their lunches made at home. Most of them it was bought... chips and very unhealthy food. So, the free lunches are definitely more nutritious. There's no doubt about that."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary schools principal*

The programme's impact extends beyond nutrition. It supports learning by ensuring students are fed and ready to engage.

> **When you're teaching kids who either don't have breakfast or didn't have a nutritious lunch, there is a benefit in the free lunches... for the nutrition connect to learning."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary Schools principal*

However, the school leader also highlighted the trade-offs, noting that the funding could alternatively support more staff and extracurricular activities. This creates an inequitable burden on schools, forcing them to choose between well-resourced teaching and ensuring students have access to food necessary for learning and wellbeing.

> **With that six or 700k, I could get a teacher coach... three more teacher aides... better resourced exercise activities."**
>
> *– FS_1, Secondary Schools principal*

Ultimately, while not a perfect solution, school lunches are a critical intervention for many students. They provide a baseline of nutrition, reduce stigma, and help level the playing field for those who would otherwise go without.

The benefits of the programme are felt not only in the classroom but also at home. In a Ka Ora, Ka Ako Evaluation Report[12], families report that school lunches ease financial pressure and ensure their children are well-fed during the day. One student shared:

> **We've got quite a large whānau at home and having school lunches really helps because it puts less stress on mum and dad... especially on a cold day, having like a hot soup really helps us."**

I AM Māngere

Who are I Am Māngere?

I AM Māngere is a grassroots organisation that works across the Māngere community to support whānau wellbeing and improve access to healthy food. Their approach is centred on building long-term relationships and acting as connectors between families and services. One area of work involves addressing barriers to food security and food sovereignty.

Advocacy is a key aspect of their work to improving food sovereignty and access. Local Kainga Ora tenants were discouraged from growing food on-site, which led I AM Māngere and other community organisations to advocate for changes to Kāinga Ora's gardening policy, Families are now permitted to grow food using mobile garden units. While this represents progress, significant challenges remain, particularly for those living in high-density housing with limited access to outdoor space.

The Community Hub in Māngere Town Centre is a welcoming space where whānau can meet with service providers, join workshops, and access support. The Māngere Community Enviro Hub is a separate outdoor space developed on Kāinga Ora land aimed to promote environmental care and food sovereignty from planting trees to growing kai and feeding families. Locals grow produce such as taro and bananas, with some garden beds reserved for whānau use and others supporting community markets.

The Food Together Programme is a food rescue initiative that provides affordable fresh produce and meat. Local suppliers donate or offer discounted food, that volunteers pack into bags and sell to whānau at a heavily discounted price. This coordinated partnership between communities and suppliers provides a simple but powerful way to reduce food waste and make healthy kai more accessible.

Looking ahead, I AM Māngere is working on building a local food hub, inspired by the Papatoetoe Food Hub. That model turned unused council land into a community-led café and food space, where surplus food was upcycled into affordable meals, locals were employed, and sustainable practices like composting were part of everyday life.

What challenges are they facing?

Despite the positive outcomes, I AM Māngere faces ongoing challenges. Funding is a major constraint, with many initiatives relying on short-term or project-based support. Regulatory barriers such as food control plans and compliance requirements also limit the ability of community groups to operate food-based enterprises.

What changes would they like to see to help them in this work?

I AM Māngere advocates for long-term investment, improved access to land, and policy changes that support community-led solutions and Indigenous knowledge systems. Their vision is for community initiatives such as food hubs and community gardens to become a standard part of local infrastructure, enabling communities to grow, prepare, and share.

Tatou Social Supermarket & Māngere Budgeting Service Trust

Māngere Budgeting Services Trust is a long-standing community organisation that provides a range of services including financial mentoring, housing advocacy, employment pathways, and food assistance.

One of their most impactful initiatives is **Tatou** Social Supermarket, a partnership with Foodstuffs North Island, KiwiHarvest, and other donors. **Tatou is** one of only two social supermarkets in Auckland and part of a small but growing network across Aotearoa. The name **Tatou** means everyone, reflecting the kaupapa of inclusive and respectful food support.

Unlike traditional food banks, **Tatou** allows families to shop for groceries using a points system based on household size. Families book appointments and choose what they need, rather than receiving pre-packed parcels. This model restores dignity and choice. As one staff member shared, "There's dignity in this shop, like a normal supermarket."

The social supermarket provides fresh produce, pantry staples, and hygiene items. Food is sourced through suppliers such as KiwiHarvest and Foodstuffs, including surplus items from producers and retailers. Food rescue is an element of the programme with use of near-expiry goods or products with damaged packaging that are still safe to consume.

Beyond food, the Trust supports families with financial mentoring, counselling through student placements, and employment support. Families work with mentors to reduce debt, access training, and find jobs. The goal is not just to provide food but to help families build financial resilience and independence.

What challenges are they facing?

Demand is growing rapidly. Last year, the Trust supported over 13,000 people, up from 8,000 the year before. Many are working families who are still struggling due to rising living costs, debt, and unexpected expenses. The service is also seeing more multi-generational households and larger families. The team relies heavily on volunteers and student placements to keep services running; however, without sustainable funding, the Trust will struggle to meet the demand.

What changes would they like to see to help them in this work?

The Trust advocates for a policy requiring supermarkets and food producers to donate surplus food to community organisations, similar to laws in France. Even with existing food rescue initiatives, the lack of timely shipping renders some foods unfit for consumption. Long-term sustainable funding for operational costs so they can plan ahead and grow their services.

2. Growing Food Locally

In Māngere, more whānau and community groups are growing their own kai and bringing back traditional food knowledge. Local organisations, marae, and grassroots groups are helping lead the way reviving mātauranga and Pacific knowledge and practices, running workshops, and creating spaces for people to learn, share, and reconnect with the whenua. Whānau are also finding creative ways to grow kai at home, even in tight spaces, and passing those skills on to their tamariki.

However, there are still barriers. Many whānau live in rentals or crowded housing with little or no backyard space, and things like tools, time, and resources can be hard to come by. Over time, the way we grow, prepare, and share kai has changed. Traditional practices that used to be part of everyday life have become less visible, especially with busy lifestyles and the rise of convenience foods.

Revival of Indigenous & Sustainable Food Knowledge & Systems

Knowledge is fundamental to food security and sovereignty. Across South Auckland and beyond, whānau, hapori, and organisations are working to revive mātauranga Māori around kai, reconnect communities to ancestral practices, and navigate systemic barriers that restrict this knowledge from thriving. The voices of marae, trusts, community groups, and hauora providers reveal how deepening knowledge of cultural significance, of growing kai, and of available programmes can transform the wellbeing of whānau and strengthen resilience across food systems.

Whānau Level: Reviving Ancestral Knowledge and Everyday Skills

At the whānau level, knowledge is both a taonga inherited from tīpuna and a skillset that must be continually nurtured, yet many whānau experience disconnection due to colonisation, urbanisation, and the pressures of modern living. As a local iwi leader explains:

> **Kai is part of our whakapapa. Our whānau here were well-known gardeners... but through colonisation a lot of our mahinga kai practices were lost, including our mātauranga and our reo pertaining to kai."**
>
> *– FS_5, Local Iwi*

Reclaiming this mātauranga through practice is critical, as she describes:

> **Mātauranga o neherā [ancient knowledge] informs our future and where we want to go."**
>
> *– FS_5, Local Iwi*

For many whānau, barriers include the cost of fresh kai, limited access to whenua, and loss of gardening skills. One kai practitioner reflected, "[The] cost of kai [is the biggest challenge]. Bread has replaced our veggies... cheaper, way cheaper." She also highlighted a lack of confidence and knowledge: "A lot of kura don't know the different rākau, their purpose for the whenua, their purpose for the people."

Across the motu, community-led initiatives are working to fill this gap. Some have built over 1,500 māra kai in whānau backyards, showing how even a small starter garden can spark transformation:

> **They end up adding to it... feeding their church, feeding their kōhanga, feeding their Nan. Some of our whānau that were mentally ill were able to give back for the first time, rather than just constantly be given to."**
>
> *– FS_11, Climate-change Indigenous organisation*

This shows how even entry-level māra kai knowledge, when embedded in the home, can uplift whānau identity and wellbeing.

A church community member emphasised the importance of drawing on local skills and creativity to overcome barriers:

> **There are other avenues we can also explore and provide our community members, with the knowledge and skills ... we can be creative, we can find creative ways. We've got people who are good with carpentry, and you know knowing how to make a wood box, to grow potatoes, tomatoes, without having that much land, just being really creative and drawing on the experience... So, it's providing their knowledge for our community so they can draw on that to grow their own food and learn how to fish."**
>
> *- FS_3, Church Community leader*

This highlights the potential of community-led innovation, using existing skills like carpentry and traditional knowledge for whānau to create small-scale, sustainable food systems. It reflects a broader theme of resilience and adaptation, where mātauranga is not only reclaimed but also reimagined to suit realities. By empowering whānau with practical tools and shared knowledge, communities can reconnect with kai, whenua, and each other.

A South Auckland Māori health organisation has an initiative focused on working alongside kaumātua, which also illustrates the power of combining knowledge with practical support. Through cooking programmes, kaumātua learned to prepare healthier kai, reversing health conditions while regaining vitality:

> **They told us, 'When we came here, we were going to have healthy, nutritious kai.' A year later, many are walking unaided. Their happiness is back."**
>
> *– FS_6, Māori Healthcare provider*

Knowledge of cooking, combined with collective practice, has clear whānau, wairua, hinengaro, and tinana benefits. Furthermore, cultural approaches to growing and accessing kai provides a sense of collective achievement and celebration:

> **Kai needs to be celebrated and worked on every day but as a whānau... that's the goal of the hākari atamira, and that's what our ancestors used to do, build these so that we could celebrate the successes of our kai systems and show off."**
>
> *– FS_1, Climate-change Indigenous organisation*

MANAVA, a South Auckland based climate resilience group (see page 36), seeks a future where Pacific communities are resourced, recognised, and empowered to grow food, care for the land, and lead climate resilience efforts rooted in cultural identity and collective wellbeing.

> **Investing in our young people's cultural connection, because that will eventually take them back to land, take them back to home".**
>
> *– FS_7, Climate-change Sustainability organisation*

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae Māra Kai, Māngere East
Guided by Hua Parakore principles, the māra kai follows kaupapa Māori values for growing kai - organic, ethical, and sustainable practices that care for people and the land.

Hapori/Community Level: Collective Learning & Intergenerational Transmission

At the hapori level, knowledge is about collective practices, intergenerational transmission, and building local food ecosystems. Marae, trusts, and community groups act as anchors for these processes. **Papatūanuku** Kōkiri Marae has long led this mahi, running wānanga, kura visits, and cultural capability workshops that reach thousands annually. These spaces connect rangatahi and whānau to māra kai, Hua Parakore principles, and tikanga around kai.

For Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra , wānanga and rangatahi innovation drive their mahi. They use environmental monitoring, seed collection, maramataka observations, and practical skills such as beekeeping to cultivate knowledge that is both ancient and adaptive. One kaimahi emphasised their role as ringa atawhai; "the hands and feet for mana whenua aspirations" [FS_12] and as a space where rangatahi are "free to tutu, to find solutions that work for our taiao." [FS_12]. This approach reframes knowledge as a living, creative force, not just a set of traditions to be preserved.

Intergenerational transmission is particularly important. A respected kai practitioner reflected:

> **We've had four generations come out in one garden... it's not hard to concentrate directly on pleasing our kui and kaumātua and pleasing our tamariki, because they both do it. You just get them there at the same time doing something that they all like."**
>
> *– FS_11, Climate-change Indigenous organisation*

Such kaupapa normalise māra as spaces of intergenerational play, teaching, and bonding.

Community organisations also highlight the importance of collective spaces for sharing and exchanging knowledge. A local Māori leader spoke of aspirations to revive the practice of hākari atamira or ceremonial food gatherings that allowed hapū to assess, share, and redistribute kai knowledge and resources. This collective learning model could transform fragmented food systems into interdependent networks of abundance.

Growing enough food to live off requires significant planning and labour, which can feel overwhelming. Many are focused on higher-paid jobs and navigating daily stress, leaving little time for self-care practices like gardening. Additionally, community groups such as MANAVA are often expected to fill gaps in emergency management without adequate support or resources.

> **Because they see that as being the hard life. They left the islands because they were tired of growing their foods. it's not like you grow a garden and then you have mea' ai (food). It takes months and months and months of planning".**
>
> *– FS_7, Climate-change Sustainability organisation*

It takes a lot of work and logistics to grow enough food to live off – "they're doing this whole challenge, but just to do three months, they've had to spend six months of planning, like, knowing what food to store, having to also grow the food"

> **But even that, it takes six months of planning everything out, like growing all your food just to be able to survive for three months that I'm like, Yeah, I can see why our elders would have left. Because it's constant thinking...I can barely think about planning my food for three days. Imagine doing for three months and knowing you have to spend six months of having to prepare it as well."**
>
> *– FS_7, Climate-change Sustainability organisation*

Systems and Policy Level: Embedding Mātauranga into Food Systems

At the systems level, our interviews highlight critical challenges. Knowledge of cultural practices and local food solutions is often undervalued in mainstream food policy, where funding structures prioritise short-term outputs and corporate food producers. One community leader noted that investment in community food knowledges produces long-term benefits:

> **"We're on a deficit-based health system. You have to have a problem before they fund it. For every dollar they spend in community health, they save $16 in public health. They know that. But because results take decades, they don't invest."**
>
> *– FS_6, Local Healthcare provider*

Similarly, funding instability undermines continuity of programmes. One Māori kai practitioner explains her experience with her own organisation that despite exceeding targets and building over 1,000 māra, "that still didn't guarantee funds... we did 1063 perfectly. And then that still didn't guarantee funds" [FS_11]. This reflects a systemic undervaluing of Māori-led food sovereignty initiatives.

Policy also shapes the spaces where knowledge can be practised. Whānau face shrinking land access due to urban intensification and disputes, and restrictive land-use regulations. As one kaimahi from a South Auckland māra trust observed, many whānau are left with only takeaways nearby, with little land for māra. A prominent local Māori leader described how, despite whānau reclaiming whenua at Ihumātao, decision-making structures keep control with the Crown:

> **Although the whenua was reclaimed by our whānau, it's sitting in a Crown trust... we haven't come to any real determination."**
>
> *– FS_5, Local Iwi*

Such systems hinder whānau from reclaiming mahinga kai and mātauranga on their own terms.

A recurring aspiration across groups is the embedding of mātauranga Māori frameworks, specifically Hua Parakore, maramataka, tohu taiao, manaakitanga and tino rangatiratanga into food policy. A local Māori leader who works in the Māori health sector summarised, "First and foremost is taking care of Papatūānuku... tikanga to whakamana Papatūānuku hei oranga te iwi. What are we achieving if we don't?" [FS_10]. For another, the vision is complete food sovereignty:

> **Food systems should be based on the fact that I said, I promise you that if you take this lettuce to feed your child, it's clean... and because of my mana, you believe me."**
>
> *– FS_11, Climate-change indigenous organisation*

Knowledge through culture, practice, and systems is the foundation of food security and sovereignty. At the whānau level, it sustains identity and wellbeing. At the hapori level, it fosters intergenerational transmission and collective resilience. At the systems level, it requires recognition, investment, and protection. The kōrero across our interviews and workshops demonstrates that reclaiming mātauranga Māori is not only about growing kai, but also about reclaiming rangatiratanga, protecting Papatūānuku, and ensuring the survival and flourishing of future generations.

Learning and growing together at the Māngere Old School Teaching Garden, Māngere
A hands-on space where whānau and community learn to grow kai, compost, and care for the soil - sharing skills that nurture sustainable living and a healthy future

Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra: Rangatahi Taiao Innovators

Ko wai a Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra?

Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra is a rangatahi-led charitable trust based in South Auckland. The kaupapa emerged from the energy of rangatahi from Makaurau, Manurewa and Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae, who wanted to reconnect with the whenua and reclaim mātauranga around kai, seeds, and growing practices. While they began as a collective of young people volunteering in marae gardens, they have grown into a movement that champions food sovereignty, environmental restoration, and cultural innovation. Their name, Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra, reflects this vision, the blossoming of many gardens, ideas, and people.

Fostering food security & sovereignty

Through collaboration with key partners such as Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae, Kumara Collective and Pāpā Rereata Mahika and Uncle 'Bee Man' Brian, Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra continues to grow their capacity and capability within the food security and sovereignty movement. Key Kaupapa such as the seed collection, and the Kumara Collective are restoring community knowledge of how to grow, save, and share kai. They integrate maramataka into their practice, guide rangatahi in understanding seasonal rhythms with a goal to foster resilience by growing food that sustains both whānau and community. Beekeeping, māra maintenance, and the revival of traditional methods ensure that kai security is approached as both a practical and cultural responsibility. They have moved deliberately away from reliance on food parcels, instead creating systems where whānau can contribute, learn, and harvest together.

Current Mahi

Today, Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra's scope has expanded. Through the Jobs for Nature programme, they employ rangatahi as Taiao Rangers to undertake restoration, native planting, and water monitoring across South Auckland. They deliver workshops in kura on gardening, maramataka, and seed sovereignty, inspiring the next generation to reconnect with taiao practices. Partnerships with Wiri Prison have seen new beekeeping initiatives established, while corporate and community groups are invited to "give back" days, working alongside rangatahi in restoration and māra projects. Data collection on local streams and monitoring of illegal dumping sites highlight their commitment to both environmental health and community wellbeing.

Challenges

Like many grassroots movements, Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra faces significant challenges. Rising food costs and supermarket dominance limit whānau access to healthy kai. The disappearance of local orchards and gardens has left South Auckland communities heavily reliant on imported, processed, and cheap starch-based foods. Limited access to secure land and resources makes it difficult to scale up their growing initiatives. Rangatahi often arrive with little inherited knowledge of māra practices, reflecting the broader disconnection many urban Māori and Pasifika communities experience with whenua.

Aspirations for change

Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra envisions a South Auckland where local whānau have more spaces to grow kai, more rangatahi pathways into taiao and kai leadership, and stronger community-driven economies. They call for policies that prioritise grassroots food sovereignty initiatives, rather than top-down funder-driven solutions. For them, true change means empowering communities to determine their own food futures, restoring pride and resilience in kai practices, and ensuring rangatahi can lead the way in caring for both taiao and whānau.

Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra
A rangatahi-led movement championing food security and sovereignty through māra, seed saving, maramataka-based growing, and traditional practices that empower whānau to grow and share kai

Beekeeping at Te Pū-ā-Ngā Māra
Teaching rangatahi the art of beekeeping and honey production, sharing mātauranga to support pollination, healthy māra, and food sovereignty

Connection to Land

Whānau/Family level: Finding Our Way Back to the Land

Many whānau in South Auckland face significant barriers to engaging with land for food production. Overcrowded housing leaves little backyard space, forcing families to choose between a garden or other essential uses like storage or play areas. Rental restrictions often prevent whānau from gardening. Time constraints, limited land access, and a loss of traditional knowledge (mātauranga) around growing kai further compound this issue.

Urbanisation and the rise of convenience culture have deepened disconnection from whenua and traditional food practices, particularly among younger generations. For many New Zealand–born Pacific youth, a sense of belonging and pride is tied more to their suburb than to ancestral lands. This limited connection to ancestral land, and to its spiritual, familial, and narrative significance (including food cultivation practices), makes gardening and growing food feel distant or unfamiliar.

> **There's nothing in our culture that isn't built from the lands. And so, if we let our lands die, then our culture dies with it."**
>
> *– FS_7, Climate-change sustainability organisation*

This disconnection is reflected in the loss of gardening traditions. Families no longer have access to the quarter-acre sections where māra kai were once common and modern housing design limits gardening opportunities..

> **I think South Auckland has overcrowded houses, no backyard … people had to choose between a garden or a tramp or a barbecue table or a shed."**
>
> *– FS_11, Climate-change indigenous*

However, some whānau are reclaiming this practice creatively by using buckets, cardboard boxes, or small raised beds to grow kai and reconnect with whenua.

Gardening is deeply rooted in Pacific heritage, such as ma'umaga (plantation gardening - Samoan), and reconnecting with these traditions restores identity, pride, and a sense of continuity across generations. Whenua is not just a source of food but of healing, where kai is seen as a form of spiritual restoration, with whānau expressing that "our hauora is in the whenua."

Wellness is deeply tied to the environment. Being barefoot on the whenua, engaging with te taiao, and growing kai are seen as essential to hauora. As one participant shared:

> **When the taiao is well, everyone's well."**
>
> *– FS_12, Climate-change indigenous organisation*

This holistic view of whenua, where physical, mental, and spiritual health are interconnected with land, is foundational to whānau-led initiatives.

Whānau-led initiatives are helping restore these connections. Programmes like Kai and Kōrero and Turuki Healthcare's cooking classes have helped families manage health conditions such as diabetes while strengthening their connection to whenua. Groups like Te Ahiwaru are reclaiming mana motuhake by growing kai on ancestral land, exercising kaitiakitanga and living in alignment with their values. Meanwhile wānanga led by kaumātua/elders are reviving mātauranga kai and maramataka-aligned growing.

Hapori/Community level: Growing Together, Strengthening Our Roots

At the community level, access to land remains a major barrier to creating healthy food environments. Many groups lack clarity on land allocation for food initiatives, and suitable parks or reserves are limited. Urban intensification has further reduced available land, and without long-term support, community gardens often rely on a few individuals to sustain them. Sustainable models, mentoring and collective buy-in are essential for their success.

Regulatory frameworks tend to favour large corporations, making it difficult for grassroots efforts to thrive.

> **Existing rules and regulations, such as MPI standards and food control plans, create barriers for local community food initiatives to sell their produce… There is no specific legal structure (like 'for purpose for profit' companies) that supports social enterprises focused on community food systems."**
>
> *– FS_8, Auckland Council*

Community-led urban farms, such as the Papatuānuku Food Hub, offer circular economic models combining employment, education, and food redistribution, but face zoning barriers and lack of recognition in planning documents. Such challenges highlight the need for policy reform to better support community food systems.

Despite these challenges, community-led solutions continue to demonstrate resilience and innovation. Marae-based kai initiatives, such as those led by Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae and Te Ahiwaru, provide culturally grounded food and learning hubs. Even in tight spaces (e.g., balconies and planter boxes) marae and individuals grow kai and there is a strong call for more local food production. Churches, schools, and Kāinga Ora properties offer untapped potential for hosting gardens, and ideas like providing garden box kits for every home could make growing kai more visible and accessible.

Initiatives such as Te Pu-ā-Ngā Māra exemplify mana motuhake in land use. Operating independently of government funding, they build reciprocal relationships with corporates and community. Their mahi includes riparian planting, seed saving, beekeeping, and restoring awa (river) ecosystems to support kai for manu, ika, and tuna showing how environmental restoration supports food systems.

Youth engagement is a key strength. Rangatahi are being trained in environmental work, maramataka, and mātauranga Māori, with a push to create unit standards for taiao-based employment that build skills and strengthen cultural identity.

Informal practices like backyard trading and seed exchange are becoming more common. Families swap produce (e.g., lemons, tomatoes, eggs) and seeds, reinforcing community resilience and normalising kai cultivation as a shared responsibility.

Underlying many of these efforts are cultural values that shape how communities engage with land and kai. Manaakitanga (caring for others) is expressed through collective food systems. Tino Rangatiratanga and Mana Motuhake reflect sovereignty and self-determination in growing kai. And tikanga Māori, guided by respect for Papatūānuku, ensures that food systems honour the whenua and uphold intergenerational wellbeing.

Systems/Policy level: Making Room for Kai in Our Future

Whenua is viewed by participants as central to food sovereignty as a foundation for holistic wellbeing. It's more than land for growing kai. It supports identity, collective responsibility and community cohesion. Recognising whenua as essential to social infrastructure and health must be reflected in policy and system design.

Systemic barriers in planning and policy limit land access. Urban farming isn't currently permitted under the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP), and its undefined status creates confusion and regulatory hurdles. Composting and selling produce are treated as commercial or industrial activities, requiring resource consent and excluding them from reserve land use.

Budget constraints limit Auckland Council's ability to acquire new land for community use, even when developers are willing to provide it. Council departments vary in their support. Some are helpful, while others are seen as obstructive or reluctant due to long-term maintenance costs. Volunteer agreements are often required to access land, adding further complexity for community groups. Local Boards, however, were identified as key allies and gatekeepers for land access and funding and are generally supportive of community gardens and food initiatives.

Zoning regulations also restrict community food hubs. Mixed-use and commercial zones are more favourable for social food enterprises, while residential and industrial zones are more restrictive. Distribution centres and social supermarkets are more easily enabled in commercial zones, but retail elements in industrial zones face tighter controls even when community demand and capacity exist.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities. Community gardens are permitted on public reserves under the AUP, and strategies like Manaaki Tāmaki Makaurau promote open spaces for kai. The Unitary Plan Review (2026) presents a critical opportunity to formally enable urban farms and social food enterprises. The National Policy Statement on Infrastructure, if it formally recognises parks and reserves as social infrastructure, could strengthen the case for allocating land to community food spaces.

Communities are increasingly ready to advocate for change. There's growing momentum to embed food sovereignty and wellbeing goals in planning documents like Local Board Plans and the Auckland Plan, and to hold leaders accountable for inclusive, community-led food systems.

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae, Māngere East
An urban marae nurturing food sovereignty and mātauranga Māori through māra kai, composting, education, and the Koha Café creating circular food systems and a place of belonging for whānau

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae

Ko wai a Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae?

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae, based in Māngere East, is an urban marae that has been nurturing kai sovereignty, mātauranga Māori, and whānau wellbeing for more than three decades. The marae began as a Kōkiri Training Centre in the 1970s, when kaumātua from across Tāmaki Makaurau united to support rangatahi and rekindle cultural practices. In 1984, the centre was formally converted into a marae, with a lease secured in 1986 through the then Manukau City Council.

Guided by the vision of Nani Mere Knight and today carried forward by leaders such as Valerie Teraitua and Lionel Hotene, Papatūānuku has become a hub of māra kai, cultural capability, and community resilience. Their founding words: Kia mau ki tō Māoritanga, continue to drive their passion, alongside a vision of mana motuhake and tino rangatiratanga, ensuring everyone who enters feels a sense of belonging.

Fostering Food Security and Sovereignty

Food Sovereignty is central to the marae's kaupapa. Their two-acre māra kai is grown according to Hua Parakore principles, a kaupapa Māori organic framework grounded in six pou: Whakapapa, Wairua, Mana, Māramatanga, Te Ao Tūroa, and Mauri. This ensures kai is produced in ways that honour whakapapa, protect the environment, and restore the mauri of both people and whenua.

For the marae, kai is not just food but whakapapa. Seeds are exchanged between iwi, kai is gifted, and surplus is shared through the Koha Cafe, where afforrdable meals nourish whānau and provide training opportunities for rangatahi. The Kai Ika project further strengthens this work diverting hundreds of tonnes of rescued fish offcuts to South Auckland families, reframing "waste" as rangatira kai. As Lionel reflects, "everybody turns up for a kai", and food becomes both a connector and currency, creating circular systems of "koha atu, koha mai".

Current Mahi

The mahi of Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae is extensive, spanning food sovereignty, education, cultural revitalisation, and whānau wellbeing. At the heart of their kaupapa is a māra kai and native nursery in Māngere, which not only produces kai but also serves as a living classroom for whānau and rangatahi. Alongside this, the marae runs the Koha Café, a hub of affordable kai, rangatahi training, and innovation that embodies their values of manaakitanga and community support. They deliver wānanga, kura visits, and cultural capability workshops, ensuring that mātauranga Māori is passed to the next generation and beyond. Rangatahi are further supported through Kai Oranga and Hua Parakore pathways, which connect māra skills to NZQA qulifications and employment opportunities. The marae also leads the nationally recognised Kai Ika initiative which has distributed nearly half a million kilos off rescued fish to whānau. Until COVID-19, Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae hosted international World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOFers) to support māra operations and create opportunities for global knowledge exchange.

Challenges

Despite their proven impact, Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae face significant barriers to sustaining and expanding their kaupapa. They operate with limited resources and are constrained by land restrictions under the Reserves Act, working at full capacity on their current site. Like many grassroots Māori initiatives, they face ongoing underfunding and a lack of recognition compared with large corporate food producers. These challenges are compounded by the local food environment, which is saturated with fast-food outlets and contributes to unhealthy eating patterns that place further pressure on whānau. Since COVID-19, the demand for kai and essential resources in South Auckland has only grown, placing further strain on the marae and its staff.

Aspirations for change

Looking forward, Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae envision a food system that restores power and agency to whānau and communities. They aspire to see greater recognition and sustainable investment in Māori-led food sovereignty initiatives, alongside an expansion of land and resources for community māra. They advocate for food policies that value small-scale, kaupapa Māori growers as vital to resilience, and for succession pathways that support rangatahi leadership and employment in food systems. Above all, they envision a shift toward circular, localised food systems that uphold tikanga and are grounded in the Hua Parakore principles of whakapapa, wairua, mana, māramatanga, te ao Tūroa, and mauri.

Ultimately, their aspiration is to become self-funded by 2040, ensuring long-term sustainability while continuing to uplift their community. As Valarie notes, their work is circular, "growing our resilience, whakapapa, connection." Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae is not only feeding people, but reimagining what kai, whenua, and mana motuhake can look like in urban Aotearoa.

3. Strengthening Local Initiatives & Food Systems

Local food initiatives across South Auckland, particularly in Māngere, are already playing an important role in addressing food access, promoting wellbeing, and restoring cultural food practices. Discussions with stakeholders in Māngere confirmed that these initiatives are often led by Māori, Pacific, and grassroots community groups and are grounded in deep local knowledge and a strong sense of collective responsibility. From community gardens and marae-based food programmes to social supermarkets and food education efforts, these actions are not only feeding people but also fostering resilience, identity, and connection.

However, despite their impact, many of these initiatives operate in isolation, face unstable funding, and are constrained by policies and systems that favour commercial and corporate values. Strengthening local initiatives means more than just supporting what already exists: it requires creating the conditions for these efforts to thrive, scale, and connect. This section highlights stakeholders' strengths and challenges and the importance of removing barriers to community-led solutions in transforming South Auckland's food environment.

Elevating and Connecting Community Initiatives & Systems

In Māngere and throughout South Auckland, communities are already doing incredible work to improve access to healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful kai. From community gardens and food hubs to social supermarkets and community food networks, these initiatives are driven by local knowledge, cultural values, and a deep commitment to supporting whānau.

Whānau level: Supporting Families to Access & Grow Kai

For many whānau, putting food on the table is a daily challenge. Rising costs, limited incomes, and health conditions make it harder to access nutritious food that fits cultural preferences. Connecting families with local food initiatives can improve whānau food access while ensuring sustainability of local food systems:

> **"You have a lot of people moaning about not having money, not having food, not having access to fresh, clean kai. But there's farms with it rotting in there because there's no one to pick it."**
>
> *– FS_11, Climate-change indigenous organisation*

Some families rely on food parcels, but these often include unfamiliar items that aren't suitable for elders or those with special dietary needs. During COVID-19, many Pacific families received boxes of food they couldn't eat, which highlighted the need for culturally appropriate food support.

> **"Even thinking about COVID-19, when they had the food drives, we got these big boxes of food, but half of the food we don't actually eat in our house... it didn't help that my parents couldn't eat it because they were like, 'Oh, we can't, like, this isn't the diet we've had our whole life.' And because they're older, they don't want to try anything, because they're scared of what it would do to their health."**
>
> *– FS_6, Climate-change sustainability organisation*

Initiatives such as the Māngere Budgeting Services Trust's social supermarket are helping change this. Instead of handing out pre-packed parcels, they let families choose their own food giving them dignity and control. The trust also offers financial mentoring, counselling, and employment support, helping families move toward independence.

At the same time, groups such as Pacific Vision Aotearoa are teaching families how to grow and preserve food. Their MANAVA programme runs workshops on composting, planting taro and hue (gourds), and storing food in jars without refrigeration. These skills help families prepare for emergencies and reconnect with ancestral knowledge. But not every whānau has space to grow food, and many are juggling work, study, and caregiving. Supporting families means making sure they have the time, space, and resources to care for themselves and each other.

Community gardens also play a vital role. Located on church grounds, school land, and public reserves, these gardens provide fresh produce and a space for learning and connection. For families without access to land at home, they offer a valuable opportunity to grow kai and engage with others.

Hapori level: Local Initiatives Driving Kai Change

Across South Auckland, marae, youth collectives, and grassroots organisations are leading the way in restoring food sovereignty. Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae has been growing kai for many years now. Guided by Hua Parakore principles, the marae grows pure, whakapapa-connected food and integrates mātauranga Māori into every aspect of its food system from maramataka and karakia to seed sharing and rongoā. Their Koha Café and Kai Ika initiatives redistribute food and create safe spaces for whānau to gather and learn about kai.

I AM Māngere plays a key role in connecting and supporting local food efforts. They operate an envirohub that promotes sustainability, environmental restoration, and food resilience. I AM Māngere also coordinates food pack distribution for whānau experiencing food insecurity and have a partnership with the Food Hub Collective, the entity behind the Papatoetoe Food Hub and other community-led food initiatives. However, they require ongoing funding to continue this vital mahi, create employment opportunities and expand their reach across the community.

> **If all of those gardens could create a cooperative and work together, profit out of all of this. And paying people salaries and having this space. There's an economic gain for those people, it's not asking people to work for free, it's asking people to work, get paid, normal wages and feel good about it because you're helping your community."**
>
> *– FS_8, Auckland Council*

These hapori-led initiatives are not only growing kai but they're growing connection, culture, and wellbeing. They are creating spaces where food is shared, stories are told, and rangatahi, whānau and communities are empowered to lead.

Systems/Policy level: Building Support for Local Food Futures

While communities across South Auckland are leading innovative food initiatives, the systems and policies surrounding them often create barriers to growth and sustainability. Many groups operate with limited funding, rely heavily on volunteers, and face complex regulations that make it difficult to expand their mahi.

One of the most significant challenges is the way food-related activities are regulated. For example, community gardens are generally permitted on public reserve land without the need for resource consent. However, as soon as these gardens begin to scale up, selling produce or incorporating composting systems, they are considered urban farms, which triggers stricter planning rules. These activities are not currently provided for under Auckland's Unitary Plan, meaning groups must apply for resource consent, a process that is costly and time-consuming.

> **At the moment, you have a situation in the unitary plan where open space, they permit gardens, so that includes community gardens, so that's permitted without the need for resource consent. What isn't provided for is what's referred to as urban farms, which is when it becomes more intensive, it has a commercial element to it, in terms of potentially selling produce on site."**
>
> *– FS_15, Auckland Council*

Another barrier is the lack of sustainable funding and support for community-led food initiatives. The Papatoetoe Food Hub, a community-run café that provided affordable, nutritious meals made from rescued food, was successful in creating jobs and reducing food waste. However, it faced multiple challenges during COVID, which made it difficult to sustain operations as it were pre-COVID. Another constant challenge was location and in 2024 the Food Hub had to vacate the Council owned site in Papatoetoe due to housing developments. The Food Hub Collective, the entity behind the Food Hub model, made an agreement with I Am Māngere. The entity is currently looking for opportunities to replicate the Food Hub model to other locations in South Aukland and beyond.

Another example of this is the Koha Café run by Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae. The marae grows pure, whakapapa-connected kai, integrates mātauranga Māori through practices such as maramataka, karakia, and rongoā, and redistributes food through initiatives like the Kai Ika project. The Koha Café provides healthy, affordable meals in a mana-enhancing way, while also creating training and employment opportunities for rangatahi. Despite their success, the marae continues to face funding challenges that limit their work and growth.

> **Now thats the other part of this food system to be realised, and it looks like cooking and entrepreneur selling kai, which is a new space for us … bringing rangatahi through there, because a lot of them, you know, switch off when you have to dig holes. But when we talk about, you know, the currency and employment opportunities that come with it in the training…"**
>
> *– FS_5, Local Marae*

A recurring theme is the vulnerability of community initiatives to these short-term funding models. Many programmes operate with limited resources, volunteer labour, and precarious financial structures. Without sustained investment, the scalability and longevity of these efforts remain uncertain.

> **We're getting there, but we're at capacity now. It's like, in order for us to do more, we need some more people to start looking at some more funding. 'Cause two and a half acres, that's the challenge."**
>
> *– FS_5, Local Marae*

Communities in Māngere and South Auckland have shown what is possible when they are resourced and trusted to lead. Strengthening these initiatives requires ongoing support, collaboration, and recognition of the unique knowledge and strengths that exist within our neighbourhoods.

MANAVA for Climate Resilience – Pacific Vision Aotearoa

Who is MANAVA?

MANAVA for Climate Resilience, originally known as Pacific People's Climate Action Project, began as a collaboration between Pacific Vision Aotearoa, Rākau Tautoko, and LAKA in August 2023. This was in response to the lack of adequate Pacific representation in the 2023 Auckland Council's Te Tāruke-ā- Tāwhiri - Auckland's Climate Plan. The name MANAVA combines meanings of heart, breath, spirit, and relational space, reflecting the community's purpose: to centre Pacific knowledge, leadership, and lived experience in climate preparedness and resilience. The group's mission is to ensure that every Pacific person in Tāmaki Makaurau has a plan to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of severe weather and climate change.

How does MANAVA foster food security and sovereignty?

MANAVA promotes a multifaceted, community driven approach that integrates climate resilience and ancestral knowledge. MANAVA for Climate Resilience comes under the umbrella organisation, Pacific Vision Aotearoa. This organisation is a wide network of Māori and Pacific groups and individuals growing a variety of food in community gardens used to support local communities. Church and youth groups are actively involved in teaching gardening skills, ensuring intergenerational knowledge transfer. Pacific Vision Aotearoa teaches food preservation techniques such as jarring and pressure canning, which allow food to last significantly longer. This, in conjunction with indigenous methods, such as using the 'hue' (traditional Māori bottle gourd) for food storage and other uses, which helps reduce reliance on refrigeration and ensure food availability during emergencies. Composting techniques are also taught, contributing to sustainable food production and soil health as well as upcycling projects. Workshops and community events foster intergenerational dialogue, where elders and youth share ancestral knowledge. Pacific Vision Aotearoa emphasises ancestral intelligence as key to youth reconnecting with traditional food practices and cultural identity. It challenges colonial narratives around Pacific food, advocating for healthy Pacific diets rooted in cultural familiarity.

What challenges is MANAVA facing?

MANAVA faces several interconnected challenges that affect its ability to scale and sustain its work. Despite decades of community-led action, funding remains uncertain and inconsistent for MANAVA Iti (the MANAVA organising core). This is an issue accross many Pacific organisations in the climate space, groups like the Pacific Climate Warriors, are voluntary, limiting members' capacity to fully commit. Access to land is another major barrier for Pacific food sovereignty. While communities are taught to grow food, many lack the space to apply these skills, creating a gap between education and practice.

What changes would MANAVA like to see?

MANAVA calls for community-led infrastructure: supporting churches and community hubs to become centres for food growing and emergency response, and ensuring marginalised communities are included in food sovereignty planning. A key priority is funding continuity, where long-term, secure funding would allow community members to commit fully to their work, rather than relying on voluntary labour or short-term grants. Access to land is essential. While education around food growing is strong, many whānau lack the space to apply these skills. MANAVA calls for land to be made available especially in areas with high Pacific populations.

Mapping the System

To help visualise the interrelationships between different components of the local food system, key themes, causes and impacts were identified and reflected in a systems map (See pages 44-45).

The systems map reflects feedback loops and leverage points for policy and community action. Six high level themes were identified:

- **Local Food Systems**
  Local food systems are a big part of making sure our communities have access to affordable, healthy, and culturally familiar kai. They're not just about food; they help build resilience and keep us connected. Things like community gardens, urban farms, food rescue, food banks, social supermarkets, and food hubs give us real alternatives to the big industrial food system. These spaces bring people together, share skills, and make sure good kai doesn't go to waste.

- **Community Capacity**
  Strong communities start with sharing knowledge and skills. Local and Indigenous approaches are key because they're grounded in our connection to land, people, and traditions. When we grow kai together, we're not just planting seeds; we're building confidence, networks, and resilience. These efforts help families and communities become more self-reliant and create thriving local food systems that reflect who we are.

- **Household Economics**
  The cost of healthy kai is a big barrier for many families. When budgets are tight, people often have to choose cheaper, less nutritious options. This impacts health and wellbeing every day. Supporting families with affordable, fresh food and practical skills can make a huge difference.

- **Industrial Food Systems**
  The mainstream food system works best for those who can afford it, but for many, healthy kai is out of reach. Cheaper, processed foods are everywhere, while fresh, nutritious options cost more. This isn't just about personal choice; it's shaped by market systems and economic barriers. That's why local, community-led food solutions are so important.

- **School Food**
  Programmes like Ka Ora, Ka Ako (free healthy school lunches) are making a big impact. They don't just feed kids; they support learning, health, and even sustainability. The best school food programmes work with schools, families, and communities to make sure kai is nutritious, culturally grounded, and part of everyday life.

- **Food Consumption**
  What we eat isn't just about personal choice; it's influenced by lots of things like cost, availability, culture, and community. Understanding these influences helps us create better food systems that support healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful kai for everyone.

Each theme is represented as a sub-model within the larger system, showing how it contributes to or is affected by food security and consumption patterns. Key features of the map include:

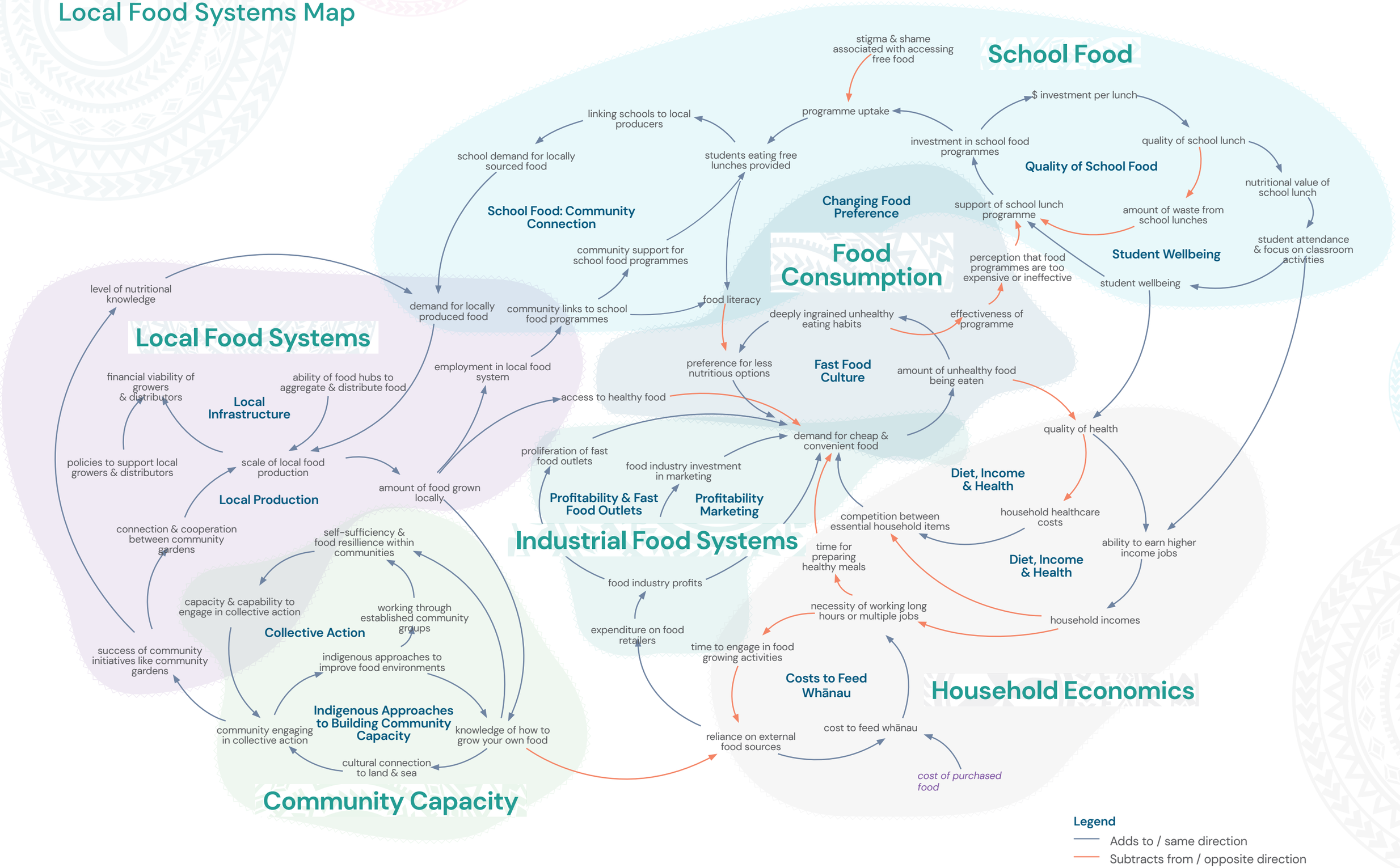
- **Causal Relationships:**
  Arrows indicate how one factor influences another. For example, an increase in the cost of purchased food leads to a higher cost to feed whānau, which in turn increases the necessity of working long hours or multiple jobs.
- **Feedback Loops:**
  The map identifies reinforcing cycles. One example is the loop where low household income leads to time poverty, which reduces the ability to grow or prepare food, increasing reliance on unhealthy, convenient options, which then negatively impacts health and further reduces income potential.
- **System Dynamics:**
  The map captures dynamic behaviours such as how demand for fast food is driven by time scarcity and low income, and how this demand feeds back into the system by increasing industrial food profitability, which then fuels more marketing and increased availability of unhealthy food.
- **Interconnected Themes:**
  The map shows how themes like school food can influence others. For instance, a well-funded school lunch programme can reduce household food costs, improve student wellbeing, and create demand for local produce, thereby strengthening local food systems.

Food environment in Māngere East:
Woolworths surrounded by multiple fast-food outlets, including two KFCs and other takeaway options, highlighting the mix of grocery and quick-service choices in the area

Ka Ora, Ka Ako school lunches
Manurewa High School students lining up to receive their school lunches

Māngere Budgeting Service Trust, Māngere Town Centre
Tatou Social Supermarket provide affordable kai using a dignity-based model, alongside budgeting advice, financial mentoring, and pathways to long-term wellbeing for whānau

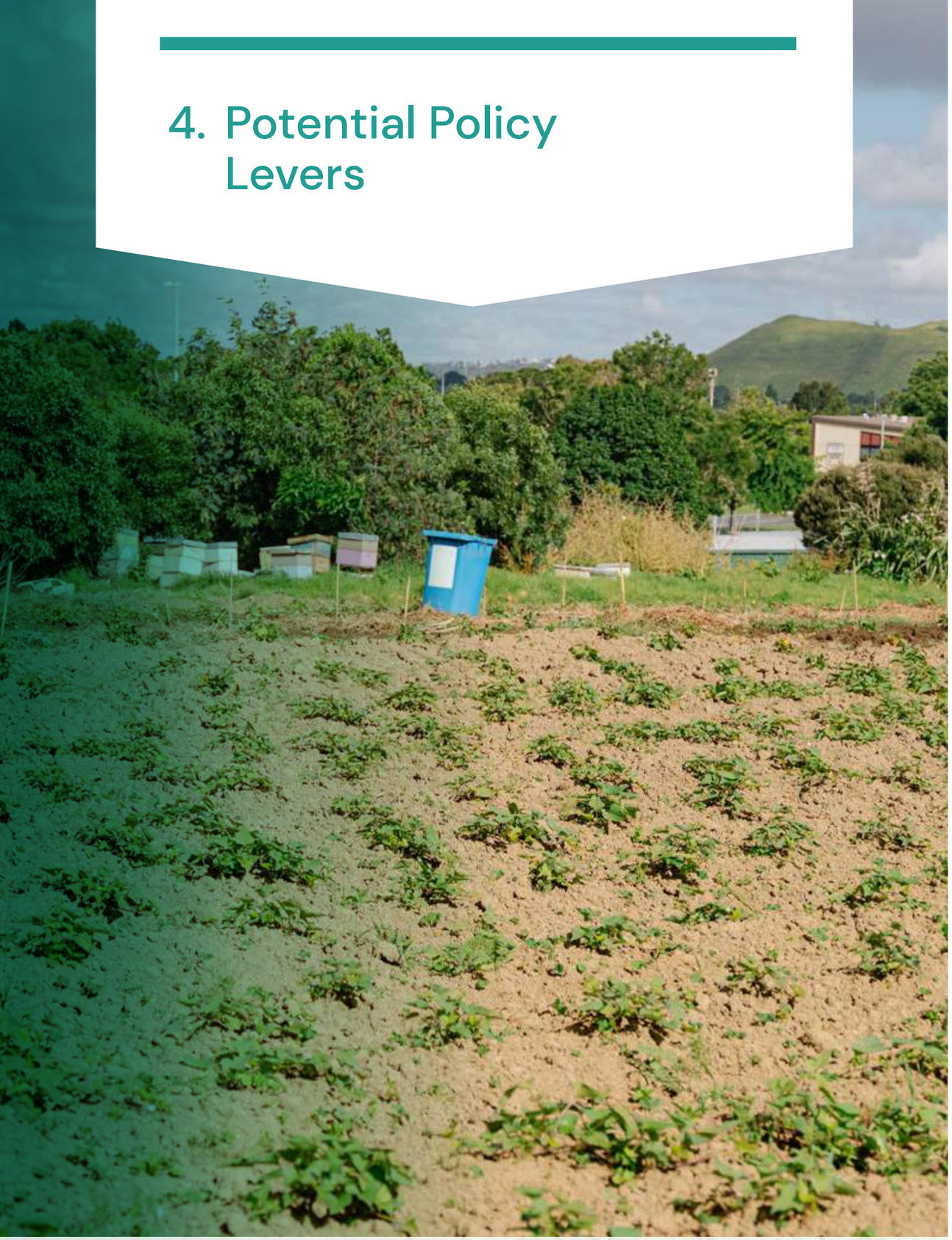
Local Food Systems Map



Legend

- Adds to / same direction
- Subtracts from / opposite direction

4. Potential Policy Levers



Māra Kūmara at Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae (Māngere East)

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Following the completion of the literature review and analysis of stakeholder talanoa/ discussions, key findings and themes were shared during a workshop, promoted to community stakeholders to seek their input and validation. A list of potential interventions and policy levers were identified by participants during talanoa/discussion sessions that helped to inform ideas for policy leverage:

Local Food Systems - Potential interventions:

- Creating markets for local food
- Developing values-based co-operative models
- Local trading/sharing crops
- Rua kūmara – food hubs, storage
- Pataka kai
- Community informed/designed frameworks
- Restorative spaces
- Traditional food growing and cooking programmes
- Legal structures for social enterprise
- Scaling current grassroots initiatives
- Urban food havens
- Everyday eats bowling club
- Thirds spaces: churches, sports clubs, reserves

Potential interventions identified in the community workshop:

- Creating more local markets and food exchanges
- Designing food and activity programmes around what whānau value and want
- Gathering, documenting family recipes and kai stories
- Find out what familes want to eat/do
- Offering maramataka-aligned growing and cooking programmes
- Building frameworks co-designed WITH communities, not for them
- Strengthening belonging through connected to whenua
- Hosting street activations such as "Kai and Korero' and 'Love Food, hate Waste' events
- Paying kaumātua to run wānanga on mātauranga kai
- Supporting community led umu, hāngī pits as sites of learning and sharing

Household Economics - Potential interventions:

- Reverse the loss of knowledge and skills
- 'Mutual aid' system for food and more
- Fruit trees on berms
- Fund start-ups for local caterers
- Sugar tax
- Tax breaks for wholefoods and healthy fast foods
- Remove GST on fruit and vegetables
- Rent controls
- Longer term rentals
- Schools as food culture hubs – food through a cultural lens
- Normalising healthy food
- Localised jobs
- Communal living
- More than gardening – urban farming
- Living wage – UBI
- Tax on UPFs

Food Industry - Potential interventions:

- Act of resistance to corporate dominance e.g., "boycott Pak'n Save". A call to challenge the supermarket duopoly and promote alternatives
- Promote and support local cultural food practices
- Local trading and "sharing of crops" - encourage community-based food exchange

- Sharing cultural food stories: effectively preserving and celebrating food heritage - reintroduce traditional practices (aligned with the Local Food Systems section above).
- Scaling grassroots initiatives - support and expand community-led food projects.
- Share resources such as street pātaka kai promoting communal food sharing systems.
- Legal frameworks for social enterprises.
- Values-based co-operative models - ethical selling and purchasing.
- Youth protection - controlling retail selling to minors/regulating food sales to protect young people.

School Lunches - Potential interventions identified in the community workshop:

- Influence government procurement guidelines, particularly dairies and takeaways within 50km of schools and community areas.
- Links into school curriculum.
- Cross-party support for Ka Ora, Ka Ako 3.0.
- Revert funding model to one closer to the original model than the new low-cost model - de-centralise Ka Ora, Ka Ako to engage more local people in the lunches programme and for the programme itself to stimulate more locally-grown, sustainable food for school lunches.

Local Convenience
A dairy in Māngere Central, located within walking distance of a local school and positioned alongside takeaway outlets, a vape shop, and a liquor store

KEY POLICY AREAS

Strengthening Local Food Systems (Auckland Council)

Use the forthcoming development of the Auckland Unitary Plan 2026 as the opportunity to create the policy environment needed to promote healthy, local food systems.

- **Enable Access to Land:** Auckland Council can support the establishment of more community gardens and urban farms by streamlining approval processes through Local Boards. A critical step is to advocate for urban farming to be reclassified as a permitted activity in the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) review, as its current undefined status is a major hurdle.
- **Invest in Local Food Infrastructure:** Policies should focus on moving beyond individual gardens to create a connected system. This includes investing in infrastructure like food hubs that can aggregate and distribute locally grown produce, helping these initiatives become economically viable.
- **Support Social and Co-operative Enterprises:** New legal structures, such as "for purpose for profit" companies, are needed to help community food initiatives become commercially viable. Local councils can provide a 'leg up' to these social enterprises through funding, low rents, and procedural support. Community members also advocate for developing values-based co-operative models to allow local gardens to work together for economic gain.
- **Simplify Regulations for Small Growers:** Existing regulations, such as MPI standards, are often designed for large corporations and create significant barriers for small, community-led initiatives. Policies are needed to simplify food regulations to suit the specific needs of these local groups.

Build Community Capacity (Auckland Council and other funding sources)

There is great passion and many local activities already underway in South Auckland to build community knowledge and expertise around local food systems. To build these into connected and impactful systems, there needs to be a substantial increase in investing in community capacity and innovation.

- **Prioritise and Resource Local and Indigenous Approaches:** Policy must recognise that building community capacity in South Auckland must be community-led, with local and indigenous approaches at the forefront. This includes embedding Mātauranga Māori in food strategies, offering programmes aligned with Maramataka (the Māori lunar calendar), and paying kaumātua to run wānanga (workshops) on traditional food knowledge.

Strengthen School Food Systems (Central Government)

Join with Health Coalition Aotearoa and its wider coalition of national organisations and provide the community voice calling for healthy school food programmes and policies.

- **Create an optimal Ka Ora, Ka Ako 3.0:** The key policy action is to strengthen the Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme by ensuring it has sustained, adequate funding and an optimised design. Version 3.0 needs to be expanded to cover more schools with high numbers of students from food insecure households, and becomes more connected with local food systems. A strong advocacy coalition from South Auckland could add significant weight to this campaign.
- **Mandate Local Procurement for Schools:** A crucial policy shift would be to change government procurement guidelines to prioritise buying produce from local growers for school lunch programmes. This would create a large, reliable demand that stimulates local food production and creates local jobs.
- **Require Healthy Food Provision in Schools:** The Education and Training Act currently requires schools to promote healthy food but not to provide it. A small but impactful policy change would be to amend the Act to mandate that all food and beverages provided in schools must be healthy.

Constrain Industrial Food Systems (Central Government and Auckland Council)

Currently communities and councils have no legal means of preventing fast-food outlets opening near schools or reducing the density of outlets based on health, equity or food sovereignty grounds. Changing this policy environment will require central government enabling legislation to provide councils with the by-law authority to include the community's and council's desires for healthy neighbourhoods into consenting for commercial food enterprises. Similarly, there opportunities to reduce the exposure of children to outdoor advertising for unhealthy foods, some of which require policy and regulatory changes.

- **Regulate Unhealthy Food Outlets:** This requires central government to pass new legislation, likely through the Natural and Built Environment Act (NBA) , that directs councils to manage this issue through a by-law mechanism. This would involve the ability for Councils to decline consent for a fast-food outlet based on locality (ie., proximity to schools and children's settings) and density. International experience suggests that such regulations are feasible and effective, however, policy arguments based on economic and environmental factors are often more successful than those based on health alone.
- **Exclude advertisements for unhealthy foods on Auckland Transport assets:** Auckland Transport (now an internal structure rather than an arm's length Council Controlled Organisation) has a policy for its advertising which disallows advertisements for some products such as alcohol. Unhealthy food needs to be included in this list and incorporated into the contractual arrangements with Media Works which now has the contract to manage this advertising on buses, trains, bus stops and stations.
- **Reduce other outdoor advertising for unhealthy foods:** Auckland Council does have authority over advertising on its own assets (e.g. parks, recreation centres, sports stadia) and billboards in general. However, this usually does not include constraints on the content of the advertising. Opportunities for this to occur will need to be explored.

Reduce poverty and high prices of healthy foods (Central Government)

While local actions are crucial, the most powerful levers for changing household economics and countering the dominance of the industrial food system are at the national level and involve policies to lift low incomes and reduce the high cost of healthy food.

- **Address Low Incomes:** Multiple policy levers will be needed to address New Zealand's appalling level of poverty, including child food poverty. These include a wider application of the living wage, Universal Basic Income approaches, wider implementation of fair pay for female-dominated professions, and fairer adjustments to welfare payments.
- **Address the high cost of healthy foods:** While removing GST on fruit and vegetables or all healthy foods has been suggested, it does come with serious equity concerns. Introducing a levy on the sugary drinks industry or a tax on ultra-processed foods could provide funding for other systems of supporting low-income households purchasing healthy foods.

» NEXT STEPS

We are now entering a critical phase of the South Auckland Food Policy Project, where the insights shared here – along with active input from community leadership - will shape the path forward.

This phase will centre the voices of Māngere whānau and hapori to validate findings, elevate priorities, and mobilise collective action for policy change.

Community Validation & Mobilisation – Late 2025

- **Reciprocity and gap-filling.**
  During this stage we will return to the community, attending hui, visiting community groups, and sharing what we learned while identifying any gaps. Socialising the report will be a key part of this.
- **Preparing the ground for growing collaborations**
  Through and beyond these connections, the SAFPP steering group will be seeking to establish a community-led collective, a supported group of local champions who will guide the next steps and help to ensure that decisions are being made by community, for community.

Policy Prioritisation – Late 2025-Early 2026

- **Planting the seeds of success.**
  The SAFPP steering group will support the community-led collective to identify which policy levers to elevate first, based on impact, feasibility, and alignment with local values. This process will plant the seeds of the next stage, empowering advocacy for the changes that matter most to the families of Māngere. With our community collaborators, we aim to co-design advocacy strategies for the policy and action areas that will have the greatest impact within the socio-political-cultural environment in 2026 and beyond.

Advocacy for Policy Change - Early-Mid 2026

- **Turning whakaaro into action.**
  The community-led group will activate agreed priorities and activities. The SAFPP Steering Group will support this work by providing backbone support, including support with access to funding, research, and strategic advice.

It is our hope that this will be a movement grounded in whakapapa, mana motuhake, and the right to nourish our people. We're excited for what's to come.

Kaiwhakahaere Māra Kai, Lionel, tending to the māra kūmara at Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae (Māngere East)

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

This project represents a significant step toward understanding and transforming food systems in South Auckland, particularly in Māngere. However, as with any complex, community-grounded research initiative, there are important limitations that must be acknowledged to contextualise the findings and guide future phases.

1. Stakeholder Representation and Engagement

While the project engaged deeply with community leaders, marae, schools, and grassroots organisations, there was limited engagement with key commercial actors in the local food system. Notably, open food markets, small-scale retailers, and large growers (e.g., Turners & Growers) were not included in the mapping or interviews. This omission constrains the comprehensiveness of the systems analysis and may obscure critical supply chain dynamics and leverage points.

2. Underrepresentation of the Industrial Food Sector

Māngere's role as an industrial hub was not fully explored in the research. The absence of perspectives from food manufacturers, distributors, and logistics providers limits the understanding of how industrial-scale operations intersect with community-level food access and sovereignty.

Pacific Vision Aotearoa - MANAVA for Climate Resilience
MANAVA brings Pacific communities together to share ancestral knowledge, grow food security, and build resilience for a changing climate. Rooted in culture and powered by connection.

3. Data Limitations

The project is rich in qualitative insights, grounded in talanoa, kaupapa Māori, and Pacific methodologies. However, quantitative data remains sparse. There is limited empirical evidence on:

- Food production volumes from existing community gardens
- Distribution reach and nutritional impact
- Economic outcomes of community-led interventions.

This restricts the ability to triangulate findings, assess scale, and model system-wide impacts.

4. Evaluation of Interventions

While numerous policy levers and community initiatives were identified, their feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and long-term impact have not yet been evaluated. This is a critical gap that will need to be addressed in the next phase of the project, particularly as the work transitions into policy advocacy and systems change.

5. Scope and Generalisability

The findings are deeply contextualised within Māngere and reflect the unique cultural, social, and economic dynamics of the area. While this specificity is a strength, it also limits generalisability across South Auckland or other urban communities without further adaptation and validation.

6. Policy Implementation Complexity

Many of the proposed policy changes, such as enabling urban farms, regulating unhealthy food outlets, and reforming procurement systems, require multi-level governance coordination and, in some cases, national legislative reform. These pathways are complex, politically sensitive, and may face significant delays or resistance.

7. Youth and Elder Inclusion

Although rangatahi and kaumātua are acknowledged as central to food sovereignty and cultural transmission, their systematic inclusion in research design, systems mapping, and policy development was limited. Pacific rangatahi were interviewed (MANAVA) and Māori rangatahi are included in many of the projects however, their involvement in workshops was limited. Future phases will need to prioritise intergenerational engagement and leadership.

8. Equity and Inclusion

While the project foregrounds Indigenous and Pacific knowledge systems, specific strategies for inclusion of marginalised groups, such as queer communities, disabled persons, and recent migrants, were not fully explored. A more intersectional approach to policy development and advocacy will be essential to ensure that food systems transformation is truly equitable.

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