



## HEALTHY FAMILIES NZ NATIONAL INSIGHTS

HOW COVID-19 CHANGED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH  
FOOD AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

*Capturing kai data trends during COVID-19*

# INTRODUCTION

## **The impacts of the first global pandemic in a century have exposed flaws in our society, including our vital food systems.**

During the COVID-19 lockdown in March and April 2020, the issue of food insecurity made headlines across the motu (island), shining a spotlight on the weak points in our food system.

The crisis also shined a light on communities rising to the challenge. Guided by the values of manaaki (to support) and connection, many mobilised and acted to ensure that nobody went hungry during the level four lockdown.

It helped many to reconnect with kai in traditional ways. Households filled their time enjoying the sensory experience that food can provide through experimentation, nostalgia, relaxation and enjoyment.

Online social networks became focal points for sharing recipes, gardening tips and rethinking ideas about old habits from the pre-COVID era.

COVID-19 has presented the opportunity to reinvent our food system with approaches that are inclusive and resilient so that food can be produced, selected, delivered and consumed with respect to the whenua (land) and the diverse needs of our communities.

Healthy Families NZ has collected vital information across the motu to understand the present opportunities to strengthen local food systems.

As a government-funded prevention initiative, Healthy Families NZ is in a unique position to accelerate action on key opportunities in this report and the findings of those reports before us.

We present this report as a call to action to address system-wide issues, using the frame of the '6 Conditions of Systems Change' ([www.fsg.org/publications/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change](http://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change)).

# METHODOLOGY

Healthy Families NZ locations across the motu gathered data from whānau and kai stakeholders to build a picture of what was happening around kai during the lockdown.

This saw a combination of data gathering methods, including:

- polls, posts and messages on community-centric social media pages (e.g. Facebook community group pages with high traffic)
- media scans (e.g. news articles, reports and interviews)
- phone calls and interviews with stakeholders and contacts
- observational data (e.g. supermarket queues, food banks)
- organisational reports (e.g. Auckland Council, CIDANZ)

Community Facebook pages and groups provided hundreds of responses to questions in levels four and three, but fewer responses were received online during levels two and one as communities moved back to 'normality'.

Rich information and commentary was sparked by social media users asking common questions. Social networks discussed the shared experience and the minutiae of domesticity.

Comments included:

- "So what are you having for dinner?"
- "Do you miss takeaways?"
- "Tried any new recipes?"
- "What's growing in your garden?"

Plain language and a single focus had much more of an impact than broad, jargon-filled questions.

Insights came from many different spaces, and food came up in conversations about lockdown experiences with social services, wellbeing practitioners, teaching staff, children and community leaders.

Observational data gathering during grocery shopping and watching people share stories and photos online was one of the most effective methods used.

It gave the ability to validate the experiences felt, heard and saw through weekly reflection. It was noticed that people's experiences evolved at a rapid pace, indicating that governing systems were basing decisions on two to three week old data.

# INSIGHTS ANALYSIS

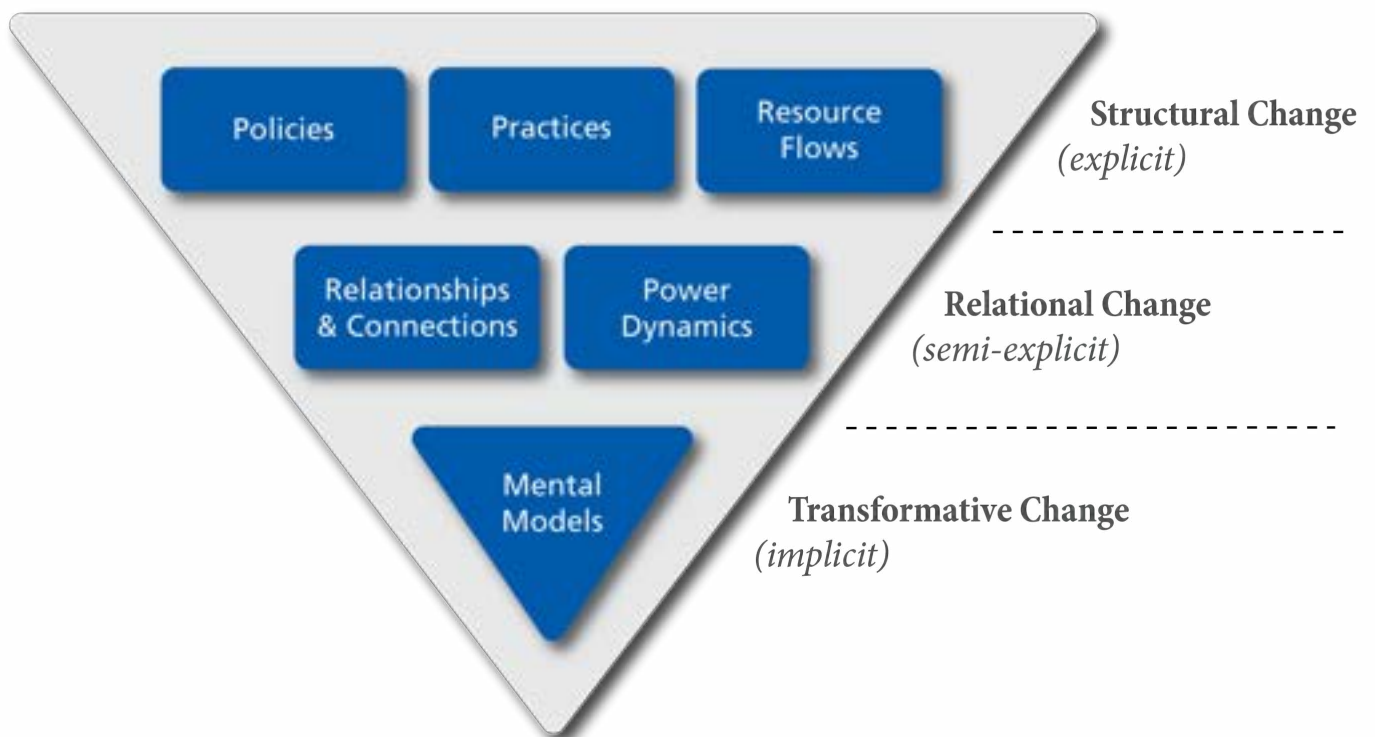
Healthy Families NZ Kai Community of Practice (Kai CoP) backbone team collaborated with University of Auckland dietetics students to analyse national insights, aligning them to the 'Six Conditions for Systems Change' (pictured below) and the action areas of the Good Food Road Map (appendix 1).

Over 500 data points were collected, and the analysis divided the data into three sections:

- behaviours, attitudes and structures around kai before COVID-19
- behaviours and attitudes during level four and three lockdown
- the opportunities in our communities for building a resilient, local food system coming out of level two.

From this analysis, the backbone team prioritised insights to help frame up 'How Might We' questions for collaborative design.

## Six Conditions of Systems Change



The following work is from the analysis of insights across Healthy Families NZ locations. They will be used to frame a conversation about opportunities and action for the Kai CoP to focus on.

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

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

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

Whilst isolation and social distancing were the new norm, the value of connection and sharing around food was felt by most - whether that be through food relief, picking up groceries or conversations online.

Kai connects people with the whenua through growing food. People value knowing the whakapapa (origins) of kai, where it comes from, how it was prepared and who it was prepared by.

Having food in the home creates unity and calm. During lockdown it became a central focus of the home, and families connected around mealtimes, cooking together and finding recipes their tūpuna (ancestors) used. Everyone has a human right to experience that in their home.



**“I NEVER COOKED SO MUCH, MORE AT HOME NOW THAT I'M NOT WORKING, REALLY NICE TO SIT AT THE TABLE AND ALL EAT TOGETHER, WE ALL FINISHED WORK AT DIFFERENT TIMES SO THAT'S DEFINITELY A BONUS” - COMMUNITY MEMBER**

**“AFTER 50 YEARS I FINALLY HAD THE GUTS TO START A MAARA (GARDEN) - I WAS TOO MUCH OF A WUSS BEFORE. I FOUND THAT MAARA KAI CAN BE WONDERFUL SPACES TO SHARE RECIPES, TIKANGA (CUSTOMS) AND TE REO MĀORI- KAI CONNECTS US TO OUR MĀTAURANGA (KNOWLEDGE).” - COMMUNITY MEMBER**

## Insight 2: Our food system must reflect the values and needs of our communities.

COVID-19 placed a spotlight on the mainstream food system, and the many opportunities to make it better serve the values and needs of our whānau.

### The mainstream system is inaccessible for many

Those who struggled to access kai prior to the pandemic continued to struggle (e.g. single parents, isolated elderly, low income families).

Ongoing barriers such as location of mainstream supermarkets, cost of food, and cultural acceptability of food were exacerbated during lockdown. Many could not travel further to mainstream supermarkets (which were the only ones permitted to open), many could not afford the higher food costs imposed by supermarket chains, and many could not access the cultural foods they were used to.

This public spotlight on food insecurity led to strong refocus of central and local government funding, community organising, service coordination and redistribution of food supply.

### Lockdown policies favouring mainstream food providers undermined local food sovereignty and resilience

Many whānau who rely on food gathering practices such as hunting and fishing were not permitted to access these traditional 'kapata kai' under level three and four lockdown policies. People living in isolated communities experience increased food insecurity when they cannot practice 'mahinga kai' to feed themselves and their wider whānau.

These restrictions also put further pressure on small town supermarkets and food stores, who weren't able to keep up with the food demand of their communities. This led to heightened community concerns for food supply during lockdown.

**"AS SOON AS YOU DELIVERED  
THAT FOOD PARCEL, THE  
HOUSEHOLD WAS CALM AGAIN."  
- MOTHER**

**KAI SUPPLY AND GROCERY STORE  
RELIANCE IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS ONE OF  
THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES THAT WE FACE  
IN OUR COMMUNITY, WITH ONLY ONE  
MAIN GROCERY STORE THAT IS UNABLE  
TO ADEQUATELY SERVICE THE HIGH  
DEMAND OF OUR DISTRICT." -  
KAUMĀTUA**



**"WE HAVE SENT TWO TAMARIKI TO LIVE WITH OUR PARENTS  
BECAUSE FOOD IS TOO EXPENSIVE AT THE LOCAL SUPERMARKET"  
- MOTHER**

**“WE STILL HUNTED  
AND GOT TUNA FROM  
A SPOT ON THE AWA  
IN LEVEL FOUR  
BECAUSE TAIAO  
(NATURE) IS OUR  
BACKYARD... BEING  
ABLE TO  
MANAAKI/CONTRIBUTE  
FOOD TO THE TABLE  
GIVES US MANA.” -  
FATHER**

*Alternative food systems serve our communities much better*

People placed great value on traditional practices and foods and sometimes needed to defy the rules (e.g. the underground economy of vegetables not available at the supermarket in Pasifika communities).

The community rallied in an incredible display of active care to make sure people had food on the table. The deep-rooted resilience of community groups like iwi/hapu/whānau was demonstrated immediately - a whariki (mat/covering) of relationship and connection that meant the needs of people were quickly established and met.

This created unity and calmness in the home.

“Knowing we have whānau (family) that are here for our needs so that we have no need to leave home is comforting” – Kaumātua (elder).

**“THE ONLY THING I AM STRUGGLING WITH IS NOT BEING ABLE TO FISH OR HUNT. I TRY TO USE FRESH KAIMOANA (SEAFOOD) AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK BUT THE SUPERMARKETS ARE SOLD OUT OR ASKING RIDICULOUS PRICES FOR FRESH KAI MOANA. SO I BIT THE BULLET TODAY AND BOUGHT FRESH FISH AND VENISON. WE ARE HAVING FRESH BLUE COD TONIGHT BUT AT A MASSIVELY INFLATED PRICE FOR SOMETHING I COULD HAVE EASILY GOT MYSELF FOR FREE.”**



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

Many in our communities found they had more time during lockdown for reflection and enjoyment of activities grounded in kai.

Having more time led to them spending more quality time with whanau, gardening, and enjoying healthier food choices instead of the usual takeaways. These were habits that many wanted to sustain beyond lockdown.

**“I'VE ALWAYS LOVED A BIT OF KFC AND MACCAS BUT I HAVE MADE A PROMISE TO MYSELF THAT I'M ONLY GOING TO INDULGE IN LOCAL KIWI MADE TAKEAWAYS NOW AND DON'T WANT TO SUPPORT BIG OVERSEAS CHAINS OF ANY KIND ANYMORE.” - MOTHER**

**“MY USUAL MODE OF OPERATIONS WAS AROUND 4 PM TRY TO THINK WHAT ON EARTH WILL WE HAVE FOR DINNER AND HOW QUICK CAN I GET IT OVER AND DONE WITH! NOW I AM MAKING ALL SORT OF THINGS, FAR MORE ELABORATE MEALS AND SPEND HALF THE DAY DREAMING AND MAKING THEM!” - MOTHER**





## Insight 4: The food industry and its ability to adapt.

The way food is sold, distributed and bought changed in a remarkably short amount of time.

Supermarkets were able to quickly enact hygiene protocols, rationing of high demand products, dedicated online delivery centres and ensure staff safety and wage adjustments. Smaller grocery stores and organisations offering food relief quickly mobilised to ensure essential work status. Growers, suppliers and food services adapted to lockdown restrictions and pivoted to online platforms for ordering and delivery. Partnerships, innovation and collaboration blossomed, enabled by technological access and capability.

### School food programmes

With schools closed, school food programmes, mentioned here but not limited to, had to rapidly change their operating model: Fruit in Schools redirected it's supply to Fair Food who then supplied food relief organisations, KidsCan redirected food to remote communities and private ventures pivoted to offering food boxes.

**"ALL OF THESE [FOOD RELIEF] ORGANISATIONS CAME BACK WITH TREMENDOUS FEEDBACK, THEY WERE NOT USED TO HAVING FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES." - UNITED FRESH SPOKESPERSON**



## Insight 5: Kai and the emotional journey.

The psychological roller coaster of such an experience had an impact on how people acted as consumers. This experience clearly showed the impact kai had on people's health and wellbeing.

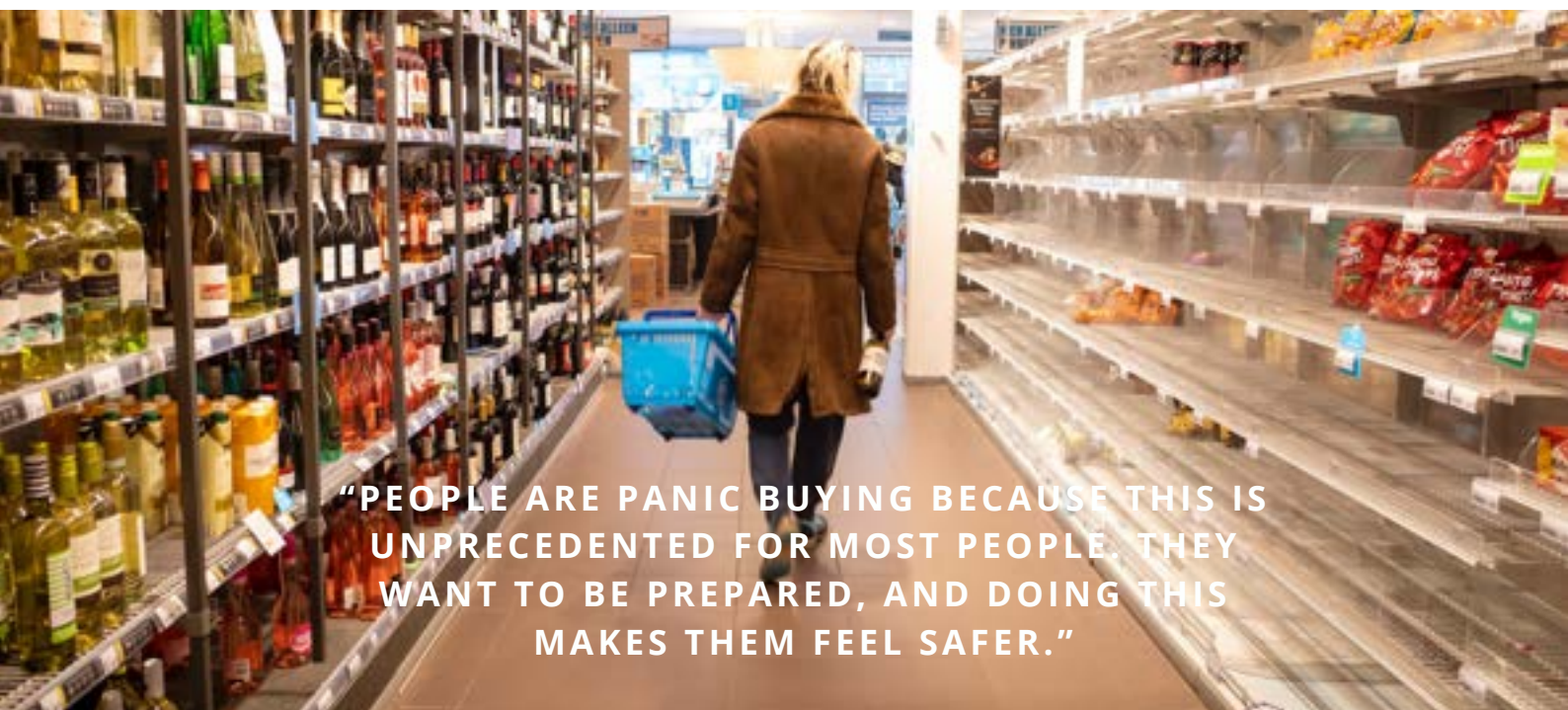
The initial shock, anxiety, anger, panic buying of pantry staples and vegetable seedlings, rude behaviour at supermarkets, online shaming and outrage on community pages; slowly changed as time went by and people got used to the 'new norm'. This came with a sense of appreciation and reconnection with nature, relative calm, relaxation and surprise – trying recipes, sharing experiences online, neighbourhood support, sitting down with family to eat, sourdough success, enjoyment of tasks related to food, or trying new practices like online ordering.

At the end of level four and other level changes created a different degree of anxiety and a mix of positive anticipation and starting to worry about easing of restrictions.

From level three onwards it was clear that people have changed their relationship with food, also reevaluating the meaning of 'essential services' and therefore how food is key for community resilience.

A different sense of pride and kindness was noted amongst community members, with clear intention to promote and support of local suppliers.

**"...EACH DAY AS I DELIVER FOOD, I'M SEEING FAMILIES ISOLATED FROM ONE ANOTHER. WORRIED CHILDREN WHO LIVE ELSEWHERE SENDING FOOD TO PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS. SCHOOLS UPLIFTING PARENTS THEY KNOW ARE STRUGGLING, BY SENDING KAI TO FEED THE TAMARIKI (CHILDREN) FROM THEIR CLASSES OR THEIR SCHOOL COMMUNITIES..."**  
**- FOOD PARCEL DELIVERER**



**"PEOPLE ARE PANIC BUYING BECAUSE THIS IS UNPRECEDENTED FOR MOST PEOPLE. THEY WANT TO BE PREPARED, AND DOING THIS MAKES THEM FEEL SAFER."**

## Imagining - questions for collective action

The Healthy Families NZ Kai CoP reconvened to discuss the above themes and explore the opportunities for collective action across all locations.

Guided by the conversational themes, three high level questions and follow up statements emerged for further inquiry:

1. How might we ensure that indigenous systems are a strong part of the food system?
  - share, learn and amplify the stories of Māori and Pasifika responses during lockdown
  - the value of indigenous suppliers/procurement and culturally appropriate food
  - kai as a catalyst to build rangatiratanga and sovereignty.
2. How might we strengthen equitable, local systems for food sovereignty?
  - representation of Māori and Pasifika and Community in government working groups
  - strengthen the adaptive capacity of local food systems
  - act as a collective monitor and keep accountable key kai stakeholders for a regenerative kai economy.
3. How might we influence conditions for food security to move from dependency to resilience?
  - support local, community-led regenerative practices
  - encourage and sustain mental models that were created during locked down
  - support communities to regain control of their food supplies
  - support food relief organisations to collaborate and understand their role in food resilience and systems change.

These *How Might We* questions will play a pivotal role as we continue working with community to find local solutions which meet their needs.



## Moving forward

Healthy Families NZ teams across the country have been working to help develop and establish sustainable local food systems long before COVID-19.

The pandemic and insights captured in this report have only reinforced the urgent need to act on our review the food system. That is, to move them from the status quo of food insecurity and dependency towards food security and sovereignty.

Healthy Families NZ has an important role to play to ensure a decisive cross-government response is achieved and solutions are formed in partnership with communities, drawing from the collective action opportunities highlighted in this report.

This movement will require resilient local food systems to make sure all individuals and whānau have access to food and drink that are affordable, appetising and nourishing, in order to improve community health and wellbeing.

It is important to acknowledge the enormous amount of work and thought leadership that has been reaffirmed and/or emerged throughout these unprecedented times.

There are plenty of well-structured stand-alone initiatives in New Zealand that, together, can create a powerful movement towards a sustainable food system.

Healthy Families NZ Kai CoP would like to invite you to join the movement and use this report as an inspiration towards a common goal: **Everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand should be able to access good food at all times.**

This report was created by Healthy Families Far North, Healthy Families Waitākere, Healthy Families South Auckland, Healthy Families Rotorua, Healthy Families East Cape, Healthy Families Whanganui Rangitikei Ruapehu, Healthy Families Hutt Valley, Healthy Families Christchurch Ōtautahi and Healthy Families Invercargill.

The Healthy Families NZ workforce is uniquely placed to work alongside community to address the themes outlined in this document. Several initiatives are currently underway across several Healthy Families NZ locations. If you would like to know more or get involved in your rohe please contact: [healthyfamilies@health.govt.nz](mailto:healthyfamilies@health.govt.nz)



## EVERYONE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS GOOD FOOD AT ALL TIMES

With local food systems that are regenerative, inclusive and resilient, food can be a catalyst for systemic change.

# GOOD FOOD

Food and beverages that are affordable, nourishing, appetising, sustainable, locally produced and culturally appropriate.

A strategic framework to encourage consistency in approach, efficiency in use of available resources, and increase collaboration for collective impact.

## ROAD MAP

### FOOD INSECURITY

The food system is not working for all, with many unable to access adequate good food, and are consuming less nutritious food due to limited options.

### FOOD SECURITY

The food system enables all people, at all times, to have physical, social and economic access to good food which fulfill their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

## FROM

### FOOD DEPENDENCY

The food system is not accessible to all, creating the need for ongoing financial and other support for people to consume good food.

## TOWARDS

### FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

People exercise the right to good food and have the right to define their own food systems - placing the control of food back into the local communities.



ACTION POINTS

A RESILIENT LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM