



Te mahi o te kai me te taiao: Key actions for enhancing our regional food ecology

Implementation ideas to accompany
Environment Network Manawatu's vision statement

**“Ā Tātou Kai me Tō Tātou Taiao:
Our Food and Our Environment”**

Background: Environment Network Manawatu's vision and wharenuī

In March 2017, following consultation with member group representatives, the Management Committee of Environment Network Manawatu (ENM) adopted the following vision statement to represent our network's views and collective aspirations.

Our vision: As people of the Manawatū River catchment, we will receive our food in ways that enhance ecosystem functioning and the environment while also supporting human health and well-being.

This vision statement serves as a metaphorical wharenuī, or meeting house¹. That is, the statement serves as a place to come together as a collective, in dialogue, and as a place of strength and identity for welcoming new participation. By gathering together within this vision, ENM members combine their knowledge and skills and support one another in the shared mahi (work) of increasing the well-being of humans and the broader ecological community.

The wharenuī metaphor can be developed by reference to ENM's role in the region. Above the entrance to the wharenuī sits the kōruru (head). This represents all the actions ENM takes to advocate, raise public awareness,

¹ In adopting this metaphor, ENM acknowledges the te whare tapa whā approach to well-being developed by Mason Durie. We also acknowledge Rangitaane o Manawatu, whose environmental officer Paul Horton and cultural advisor Terry Hapi gave us the idea and the guidance to adapt the wharenuī metaphor to this context. We are grateful for additional generous and constructive We wish to note that Te Ao Turoa Environmental Centre (Rangitaane o Manawatu) and Te Kāuru Eastern Manawatū River Hapū Collective are among those member groups who constitute ENM. ENM acknowledges that there are additional iwi and hapū who hold mana whenua over parts of the Manawatū River Catchment.

and welcome new participants who wish to contribute to the realisation of our vision. ENM's role is to serve as a coordinating organisation, that is, as the tuaiwi (the backbone, or the tāhuhu / ridgepole) of the wharenuī.

Working together, ENM's member groups serve as the collective heart of the environmental network. These groups have all made a commitment to collective community action to realise a vision of an enhanced Manawatū environment. Their work includes direct action, advocacy, education, fundraising, and other forms of support. Their objectives include enhancing water quality, conserving biodiversity, creating more sustainable urban and rural environments, and otherwise enhancing the regional environment. Many of our member groups are involved in initiatives related to growing, using, and/or distributing food². From the shared inspirations, hopes, and values of these members has grown the poutokomanawa, the wharenuī's central heart post.

Supporting and upholding members' actions are the corner and side posts that support the wharenuī. These six pou, or pillars, are integral to our vision:

1. Pou tikanga (mahinga kai, pātaka kai) / Traditional food cultures;
2. Pou taiao / Regional ecology;
3. Pou atua / Approaches to growing and harvesting food that honour soil, water, air, and biodiversity;
4. Pou mauri / Appropriate energy and resource use to respect the integrity of life;
5. Pou ohaoha / Economy;
6. Pou tangata tiaki (kaitiakitanga) / Education and culture change as care for the future.

Possible actions associated with each of these pou are discussed later in this document.

² Representatives of ENM's food-oriented members were interviewed at length to support the development of ENM's vision statement and this accompanying document. Representatives of all ENM member groups were given the opportunity to respond to a draft of this document, which was then revised in response to their feedback.

ENM member group initiatives

ENM recognises that the manifestation of our vision will require that we produce and distribute food in ways that care for our region's soil, groundwater, surface water, air, indigenous biodiversity, and—regardless of their income—people. It requires that we work together to shift the way we grow our food crops, manage poultry and livestock, harvest wild foods (including plants, fish, and game), care for the habitat of our wild food species, manufacture, package, and distribute food, and manage waste products associated with growing, harvesting, manufacturing, distributing, and preparing food for human consumption. The vision also requires the renewal and development of food cultures that connect people to their local area.

While ENM and our members are unable to enact our full vision on our own, we will, according to our capacity, advocate in ways consistent with the vision, partner with others to help deliver in key action areas, and lead or support initiatives that can contribute to ecological and community outcomes as indicated within this document.

Already, ENM members are collectively involved in the following:

- Projects and research to develop resources associated with mahinga kai (place-based gathering and cultivation of food);
- Primary schools gardening and cooking programmes;
- Adult community education in horticulture, beekeeping, permaculture, cooking, preserving, and more;
- In-home, one-on-one mentoring in gardening, cooking, and preserving;
- Partnerships with groups and organisations serving children;
- Edible plantings in community reserves, schools, and other shared spaces;
- Produce sharing tables and support to get these going;
- Volunteer fruit and produce harvesting and distribution;
- Farmers' markets, community markets, and support for growers' co-operatives;
- Local distribution for a community-supported farm;
- Land care advice for farmers;
- Fish and game management;
- Funding for eco-oriented community food initiatives;
- Tie-ins with groups and organisations addressing access to food and nutrition.

We recommend additional mahi, or work, in keeping with the practices identified in the remainder of this document. These practices should not be read as an exhaustive list. Additionally, some of the items in list may be most appropriately applied only in certain contexts. The list is provided for illustrative purposes and to share ideas.

1. Pou tikanga (mahinga kai, pātaka kai) / Traditional food cultures

ENM supports diverse food cultures that provide strong and sacred connections between people and place. We acknowledge both the inspiration and the inherent value of tikanga, including tikanga associated with mahinga kai and pātaka kai.

Further, as a network-supporting Management Committee, ENM commits to respecting the tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) of tangata whenua. Within our capacity and in accordance with our constitutional purposes, we seek to respond to the leadership, guidance, and aspirations of tangata whenua and their recognised representatives.

As a networking organisation, ENM’s intent it to operate in accord with the following practices:

- Keeping iwi and hapū authorities informed of relevant activities and taking advice;
- Making our regular support services available for regional Māori-led mahinga kai projects, when requested, regardless of formal ENM membership;
- Generally respecting Māori self-determination—the tino rangatiratanga of tangata whenua—in our words and actions.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Developing distinctive food cultures that are well rooted in our particular place, for example by developing locally-adapted cultivars and working with our local ecology;
- Using food and food culture as a way to enhance social connectivity and connection with the earth;
- Celebrating our agricultural calendar and eating good food together as a community;
- Remembering the sacredness of soil, air, sunlight, water, and seed, and developing reverence for these as one aspect of ethical food production.

2. Pou taiao / Regional ecology

ENM's vision for food provision is integrated with our conservation values and our advocacy and action to protect and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. ENM acknowledges that biodiversity and intact ecosystems have intrinsic value as well as key roles in supporting agriculture.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Developing and publicising a list of food crops that are incompatible with indigenous biodiversity (e.g. “weedy” crops);
- Ending the conversion of any remaining bush and wetland remnants to agricultural areas;
- Creating integrated management plans that indicate priority areas for the expansion of indigenous biodiversity as well as for continued grazing and crop production.

3. Pou atua / Approaches to growing and harvesting food that honour soil, water, air, and biodiversity

To be ecologically sound, sustainable, and resilient, food needs to be grown and harvested in ways that care for soil, water, air/climate, and biodiversity. ENM promotes practices that enhance these resources and avoid ecological harm.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Ensuring that wild foods are harvested at a sustainable rate;
- Growing food organically;
- Growing food using biodynamics and permaculture design;
- Systematically and rapidly reducing current levels of pesticide and herbicide use and artificial fertilisers with the goal of eliminating their use altogether;
- Conserving heritage food varieties;
- Taking a co-evolutionary approach to seed, poultry, and livestock development where practicable, with varieties and breeds evolving in a context of local use;
- Banning all GMO crops, and also imported GMO food products that have potential to contaminate regional crops;
- Planting for pollinators;
- Providing shelter, habitat, feed, and care that meets the behavioural and health needs of livestock and poultry;
- Minimising soil tillage;
- Ensuring highly erodible soils maintain a vegetation cover;
- Planting polycultures including perennials and tree crops.

4. Pou mauri / Appropriate energy and resource use

ENM's vision requires honouring the spirit and integrity of life in all its manifestations. One way we respect life is by appropriate use of energy and material resources. This means applying the value hierarchy of refuse, reduce, reuse, and recycle. We seek to minimise food waste, other forms of material waste, and emissions associated with processing, packaging, and transporting food. We also seek to minimise the use of non-renewable energy and other non-renewable resources when growing and distributing food.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Reducing food miles and food packing by connecting growers and eaters and by increasing the availability of home-grown food;
- Providing businesses with advice on how to eliminate and minimise food packaging, taking into account that some food safety regulations make environmental harm the easiest course of action;
- Advocating for an appropriate regulatory environment that is complemented by compliance strategies that meet food safety and other policy goals while minimising the negative impacts associated with packaging;
- Developing packaging that is easily reused or recycled within the region;
- Redistributing food that would otherwise be wasted, including harvesting unwanted food at farms and home gardens, plus collecting food from supermarkets and other outlets;
- Developing and using technologies that make social networking for food distribution more decentralised, efficient, and/or widespread;
- Providing education and awareness-raising around the extent of food waste and how to minimise it through changes in household and business practice;
- Simplifying routes for both businesses and households to make good use of organic wastes that can no longer be fed to humans, including the development of collection strategies for animal feed and compost materials to serve those who cannot or will not use these products on their own premises.

5. Pou ohaoha / Economy³

ENM supports the development and regionalisation of the formal and informal economy in ways that connect regional growers and eaters. We support initiatives that enhance the capacity and markets of regional growers who have adopted, or who are seeking to adopt, growing practices that contribute to human and ecological well-being as set out in the rest of this statement.

ENM is aware that some growers for regional markets have poor growing practices with respect to the environment and human health, and that some growers serving national and international markets do an excellent job outside of the impacts of food transportation. We generally support the development of regional food economies and eco-growing practices considered separately, and even more so when these are integrated.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Developing the gift economy, for example through increased availability of produce sharing tables, crop swaps, and similar approaches to developing a community that shares food;
- Providing market opportunities for small growers serving local and regional markets, such as farmers' markets, co-operatives, regional produce distribution chains (e.g. food boxes), and community-supported farms;
- Promoting and advertising farms that grow food in ways that are commensurate with the ENM vision statement;
- Providing education, mentoring, advice, networking, and other support for farmers and growers, including economically realistic advice for transition plans to more sustainable agriculture, and also including advice on crop diversification and niche marketing for increased ecological and economic resilience; Providing professional support to address constraints on farmers and growers, including financial constraints, that limit their capacity to adopt ecological good practice in farming;
- Developing branding that helps consumers to recognise food products that have been grown in ways that are consistent with this vision statement.

³ Although this section of this discussion document relates to the economy, its focus is on relationship rather than on food as a market and export commodity. Nonetheless, the core values and action areas of this document, taken as a whole, can rightly be construed to have implications for the region's agribusiness.

6. Pou tangata tiaki (kaitiakitanga) / Education and culture change as care for the future

ENM's aspirations require nurturing and developing a culture in which everyone participates in environmental guardianship for future generations. This requires a combination of culture conservation and culture change, including mātauranga, or education to share wisdom and knowledge. We support (1) all-ages learning and skills development to enhance eco-food outcomes through direct education, (2) the use of public and community spaces to help establish and share eco-food cultures, and (3) additional forms of public awareness-raising.

Beneficial practices for the region include:

- Developing gardens, orchards, and edible plantings in parks, reserves, and other council lands, to provide sites for learning, inspiration, and food sharing; Cooperatively integrating these with other uses of public land;
- Providing urban residents with access to land with minimal soil, air, and water pollution to give them opportunities to engage in allotments, community gardens, and urban farms; Ensuring that high-density planning incorporates green space not only for recreation and contact with nature, but also for urban food production;
- Planting edibles at the premises of organisations such as schools, health centres, councils, retirement homes, service agencies and other organisations, with a particular emphasis on organisations that have an educational or leadership role in the community, or that serve those in need, or that have a health mission or duty of care;
- Providing abundant, varied, and income-accessible approaches to horticulture education, including workshops, programmes, and mentoring for all ages and ability levels in homes, schools, and the community;
- Developing a public source of advice and information about growing food;
- Developing and show-casing highly visible, high-impact, inspiring and ecologically sustainable approaches to food growing, including urban market gardens and sustainable farms that have been developed as destinations for school visits, tourism and community education, and outreach to homeowners and commercial growers;
- Creating festivals and public events that raise awareness of the value of local food and eco-food.