

Aotearoa Food Systems Dialogues

Summary Report

18 June 2020



Report by
Spira 2020



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Contact
Emily King
emily@spira.nz

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01. Overview

Food Systems Dialogues



01

On 18 June 2020 a Food Systems Dialogues (FSD) event took place in Aotearoa (New Zealand), co-organized by Spira and AgRESTORE™. This FSD event was held in the context of COVID-19 and online.

Who took part?

Approximately 70 participants attended from around Aotearoa, reflecting a range of actors working in food systems. Including: kaumatua and kuia (elders), farmers and growers, food system specialists, nutritionists, people working on food loss and waste, businesses, industry, central and local government, non-governmental organisations working on issues of access to healthy food, and researchers.

Purpose of the event

The purpose of holding the inaugural FSD was to catalyse change in the Aotearoa food system, whilst embracing the shared values of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). Thus a big effort was made to include many Māori, including farmers and food business owners. We thank all of you, who gave your time and knowledge, for facilitating, and for providing a welcome and closing address to the kaupapa (purpose).

02. Framework The Format

02

Process

We followed the global FSD format with guidance from 4SD.

70 people discussed seven different topics, one topic in each Breakout-room of ten people. Discussion topics are phrased as ambitious 'ideal future states' of food systems to aim for in Aotearoa. Breakout-rooms were asked to present one or more proposals for action to address that specific area of Aotearoa food systems. Ideally, the proposals were to be achievable within three years.

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to that topic, as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions. Not all Break-out rooms came up with proposals, some share only the debates that were had.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all

participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

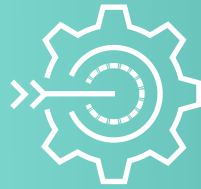
Each Break-out room had a different facilitator and diverse participants from different parts of the food system. The dialogue and style of reporting reflects that diversity and it's intentional that the conversation differs between topics.

1 Fishing, farming and growing practices protect and enhance our soils and waterways and reduce our impact on climate change.

2 Food production (agriculture, fisheries, horticulture) on land and in farms reaches those who need it the most, while farmers are paid fairly for it, and rural communities thrive.

3 People working along the food chain from farm to fork minimise risk of infection and exposure while businesses can continue to safely operate.

4 Healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food is available for all New Zealanders, especially our vulnerable communities. All New Zealanders are food secure.



The need for change

'We need to chart a new pathway forward in our food system and this is the start of that: through bringing diverse, knowledgeable, people from across the sector together to champion change. Multiple concurrent conversations and actions to make change are underway, many boosted by COVID-19, but some latent issues remain. These need to be clearly identified and threads need to be woven together, because at the moment different groups and sectors work separately on interconnected issues.'

Emily King, Director of Spira.

5 Food waste is reduced by 50% across food business operations by 2030.

6 Food systems continue to function in the context of a constant threat of Covid-19 outbreaks, following the current acute phase. We have a pandemic and crisis- ready, resilient, food system.

7 The healthiness of our food environments is improved to reduce our levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

Topic 1

Fishing, farming and growing practices protect and enhance our soils and waterways and reduce our impact on climate change.

We will know we have succeeded when:

1. We lead in sustainable food growing practices and focus on new non-traditional foods and real foods from Aotearoa, as well as the traditions of beef, lamb, and dairy.
2. Initiatives are connected. At the moment there seems to be individualistic thinking at the industry sub-group level, and different sectors working on different initiatives, but not together. Success would be coming together to make transformative change.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

1. We are currently killing the biology of the soil in the way that we farm. For example, nitrous oxide caused from using nitrogen fertiliser has approximately 300 times the heat trapping capacity of carbon-dioxide. It is possible to farm without it or at very low rates.
2. We must have a collective desire to value how we produce food, to help our well-being, immunity and resilience. Acknowledge that we are using poisons that are making people sick.
3. Climate change is the need for change. We need to cater for the forthcoming major differences in weather, namely prolonged droughts, bigger storms and flash floods (ie climate change adaptation).
4. The importance of sequestering or building up the carbon levels in our large scale agriculture and horticulture soils is a paramount strategy. Equal importance must be given to looking at the biological life of soils to help build up soil carbon, noting it is time to move away from heavily dependent artificial fertiliser agricultural-chemical farming.
5. The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) was not discussed, however given the emphasis by the group on the ability for soil-carbon levels to increase through pasture management technique improvements (i.e regenerative agriculture grazing advice), should this avenue of soil-carbon building be included in the ETS dynamic?
6. Noted also that Te Tiriti O Waitangi, Article 2, regarding protection of our waterways continues to be compromised. The increasing water crisis also continues to put our food security at serious risk.

Topic 2

Food production (agriculture, fisheries, horticulture) on land and in farms reaches those who need it the most, while farmers are paid fairly for it, and rural communities thrive.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

Policy

1. We have all the assets required for food production here in Aotearoa but distribution needs to be even.
2. MPI Food Safety could be more comprehensive.
3. Are we covering all the bases in respect to food production?

Good Food

1. Significant segments of the community missing out on healthy food.
2. Economic motivations of producers to export the high value / higher quality product.
3. Downstream impact to health and wellbeing needs to be accounted for.
4. Role and responsibility of producers in the market needs to be enhanced. Should this responsibility be put on the supply side, or more of a demand (education) problem? Or require government intervention (regulation)? Or is it likely to require changes in all of the above?

The issue of giving away and redistributing food

1. The positive is that people in need get more food and better food; the negative is that it devalues the perception of food.
2. Groups, hapū, iwi, and charities are doing wonderful things, but they rely on volunteers, grants, and goodwill.
3. Is this resulting in a fair return to farmers and is it really helping the communities thrive? Is this sustainable longer term?
4. What happens when priorities, budget demands, politics change? E.g. COVID-19.

Local production

1. Certain regions in the country have access to plenty of quality local food e.g. Taranaki, Northland, East Coast.
2. Other more urban regions like Manukau are notably deficient.
3. We are seeing encouraging growth, albeit small, in farmers' markets and Apps supporting honesty boxes. These are supporting smaller food producers who are being paid a greater share of the margin and therefore more fairly.
4. Encouraging more of the bigger retailers to have a local section and invest in promoting it.
5. More awareness of where food is produced, natural crop seasons and the impact of importing everything all year round.
6. Clearly access to supply of local produce is not fairly distributed nor universally adopted by those that should be eating more local food.



Water

1. Increasing patterns and persistent droughts.
2. Do the urban users of water understand the impact to the rural producers?
3. Many producers continue to grow high water use crops because there remains significant demand. They are not paying for this resource and as a result, consumers are not paying for it.
4. We need to look at other crops with lower water use, e.g. asparagus grows quickly and is highly nutritious with less water.
5. Excess nitrogen and phosphorous impact our waterways.
6. A lot of talk around water issues, but few initiatives that we can be proud of.

Production

1. Not all producers have access to export markets.
2. Consolidation and standardisation of production is required.
3. We need to preserve our indigenous seeds.

Issues with the “conventional model” of high inputs with low outputs

1. New Zealand has become reliant on this model and it is not sustainable. Could we invert the model towards a meaningful sustainable solution for NZ?
2. An example in meat production where they actively seek farmers that focus on lower inputs, then they extract high value components, into cosmetics etc, retaining the high outputs of food quality.
3. Other examples include extracting high value proteins and exporting to niche markets, e.g. Japan. Is this being done effectively in respect to not depreciating the food quality and betterment on New Zealand consumers?

Topic 3

People working along the food chain from farm to fork minimise risk of infection and exposure while businesses can continue to safely operate.

We will know we have succeeded when:

1. We collate key learnings from historical infection control events and apply them now before any future infections arrive.
2. We have equitable access to technology and food.
3. We have security of food access for all people and New Zealand continues to produce through an infection/outbreak. The following points would help that:
 - a. Shorter supply chain, less links that can break.
 - b. Producers have the ability to market produce locally.
 - c. Market is not restricted to dairies (corner stores) and supermarkets as sources and outlets for local food.
 - d. Food businesses can make decisions on the run and adapt to different challenges.
 - e. Individual firms reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on their business, and sector wide we have learned from each other and addressed the gaps, including distribution and processing.
 - f. We are managing the manageable so that we can be flexible to adapt to things that are outside our control.
 - g. We are sharing our learning across sectors.
 - h. We are appreciating the value of technology.
 - i. We are on the front foot for any disease – affecting any part of our food system, humans, animals, plants.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

We are articulate about health and the impact it has on economy, as well as the impact of the economy on health. These two things are inextricably linked and impact one another. You can't have an economy without healthy people, and you can't have healthy people without an economy that supports them.



‘During COVID-19 iwi Māori ensured there was active involvement in most decisions made. The strengths of local tangata whenua communication proved invaluable when working through the logistics and effective implementation of keeping themselves and their communities safe in the crisis.’ - Participant



Topic 4

Healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food is available for all New Zealanders, especially our vulnerable communities. All New Zealanders are food secure.

We will know we have succeeded when:

1. We have adequate incomes such as Living Wage and we raise benefits for women.
2. We are measuring and reporting on the actual state of our nutrition in Aotearoa by conducting a population nutrition survey. The current data we use is 10 years old from the 2008/2009 survey.
3. There is shared ownership and collective leadership, and there is accountability for actions.
4. Community-led solutions exist, with the government as an enabler and supporter. 'Food' is as important as a concept as 'Infrastructure' when being discussed at a government level. Local, regional and national coordination is required.
5. There is a focus on agency and resilience. Food sovereignty respects Te Tiriti o Waitangi as well as having a Pacific Island nutrition focus.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

1. There are a multiplicity of factors and drivers of food insecurity. During the COVID-19 lockdown community food gardens were classified in some areas as playgrounds and therefore closed, which meant people couldn't access that food or work in the gardens. Need to reclassify 'food gardens' from 'playgrounds' so food in a pandemic can be distributed.
2. Moving from the immediate 'COVID-19' to resolve food insecurity to a future focused on food security.



3. There is tension between a 'Food Strategy' and a 'Food Security Strategy'.
 - Economic security builds food security, one won't work without the other.
 - We see 'easy' access to 'poor' food and 'hard' access to 'good' food.
 - We should look to the Food Strategy recently released in Canada as a way to not re-invent the wheel.
4. Discussion on a 'Citizenry of Food' (supported by the people, locally) as opposed to a 'Ministry of Food' (central government, top down).
5. Hapū Māori throughout their tribal boundaries, have a wealth of generational knowledge and experience, yet continue to be disadvantaged through the lack of fair resourcing, respect and understanding of the cultural makeup and health of environments.

Topic 5

Food waste is reduced by 50% across food business operations by 2030.



We will know we have succeeded when:

Businesses take on food waste reduction initiatives

1. Businesses sign up to a voluntary commitment to reduce food loss and waste e.g. UK's Courtauld Commitment.
2. Businesses start reporting on their food loss and waste improvements each year.
3. Cosmetic requirements are removed and "ugly" fruit and vegetables are sold.
4. Upcycled food is adopted by business.
5. All businesses are linked to composting systems e.g. currently occurring on Waiheke Island.

There is collaboration and data collection across the food supply chain

1. Cross-collaboration exists across our whole supply chain e.g. New Zealand Food Waste Champions 12.3.
2. There is increased collaboration between producers, social services, and food rescues.
3. Formalised collaboration between businesses is achieved through a voluntary agreement, with targets, measurement and reporting requirements.
4. Businesses are redistributing surplus food and playing a role in upskilling the people that are receiving that food.
5. A baseline is established, with particular increased knowledge in primary production food waste.

Consumer food waste reduction behaviors are enhanced

1. Consumers are adopting food waste reduction behaviours e.g. planning their meals, writing a shopping list and using leftovers.
2. People are eating more plant-based meals.
3. Food skills and food literacy needs are addressed.
4. The food we tend to waste more of is eaten e.g. bread.

Other system changes are achieved

1. Compostable and reusable packaging is available, and packaging systems are enhanced.
2. Local food systems are enhanced through community plans that address food loss and waste.
3. Technology and Apps are made readily available e.g. Foodprint & CoGo.
4. Recommendations in the Environment Select Committee's report on food waste are adopted.

Quality food is available to all

1. Good quality food is redistributed to those who need it and people are given food sovereignty.
2. Good quality food is produced in hospitals (and other areas) to reduce waste.
3. The abundance of food in the system is allocated responsibly to all through an enhanced food rescue network/alliance.

The conversation is re-framed

1. "Food waste" is re-framed to "quality surplus food". "Food loss" is used more frequently, which accounts for the pre-retail stage.

Debate	Overcoming that debate
Businesses are not environmentally or socially focused.	Put forward the business case to reduce food loss and waste, and consider New Zealand based data e.g. international study that found a 14:1 return on investment in food waste reduction activities.
Food waste is just "another thing" that is hitting business.	We could tie food waste with other issues that businesses are dealing with e.g. encourage food waste to be incorporated into business sustainability/ climate change plans and incentivise the uptake of any voluntary agreement on food waste reduction.
Only a small section of community is consciously consuming.	Shift consumer behaviour through educational campaigns (e.g. Love Food Hate Waste) and effective food waste reduction technologies (e.g. Foodprint and CoGo).
This is not currently a government priority.	Lobby government to ensure it is thinking about incentivising food waste reduction through policy settings such as setting a national target in line with Sustainable Development Goal Target 12.3, incentivising businesses, national waste reduction policy, education campaigns and legislation e.g. tax incentives for food waste reduction.
There is a lack of leadership and involvement by key players.	Collaboration to ensure the key players are at the table e.g. build on the efforts of New Zealand Food Waste Champions 12.3, which is the first collaborative effort to combat food waste in New Zealand.



Global Food System Change

‘Engaging all the different actors and trying to bring them on to the same page is the secret to ensuring good food system transformation.’

Dr David Nabarro

Curator, Food Systems Dialogues

Topic 6

Food systems continue to function in the context of a constant threat of Covid-19 outbreaks, following the current acute phase. We have a pandemic and crisis- ready, resilient, food system.

We will know we have succeeded when:

1. A food system moves beyond survival, so it delivers both calories and quality food and shows connectivity between eaters and where their food comes from.
2. Resilient and adaptable food systems exist in our country.
3. There is a healthy relationship with food and an ability to pivot when needed.
4. Food resilience is part of the curriculum in schools, and the education sector is part of the solution.
5. Food is a relational tool. A resilient system doesn't have inequality. There needs to be values and principles applied to our food system that we adhere to.
6. Food can play a role in de-carbonising our lives. A successful resilient system has informed consumers who are educated and have easy access to good food.
7. Biosecurity is an important part of a resilient system. The timeframe is important when considering resilience.
8. Large centralized systems are not resilient. Participation is needed at community level. "Local" is the key word.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

1. Currently a disconnect at policy level. We need an overall structure to give policy signals.
2. Can resilience be built from top down or does it have to be bottom up?
3. We need more than a framework, we also need a pathway to action.
4. There is a battle for resource allocation from local and regional councils through to government and agencies. Where's the enabler to local resourced systems?
5. We need to nurture and support different perspectives.
6. We need to empower local systems.
7. The people we want to influence do not have this on their agenda. Connecting to easy, accessible affordable food at a community level is the key thing.

Topic 7

The healthiness of our food environments is improved to reduce our levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

We will know we have succeeded when:

1. **A national strategy** with all of the relevant sectors and entities involved in food convene on what is needed for a sustainable food system – not just focused on health or food – as that focus will be too narrow. It needs to be interdisciplinary as currently the voices on this issue are disparate. This is called for in the INFORMAS Food EPI report published in June 2020 but other groups are also calling from this from other sectors – its time to join up.
2. **A top down and bottom up approach** capitalises on the thought leadership about what is needed from a national government-led level and what can be achieved at the community level and effectively scaled up.
3. **The role of Chief Nutritionist** is perhaps reinstated, to have that key senior position that advises the government at a national level. The role has been disestablished and would be good to set direction and act as a focal point with evidence to support action.
4. **Regulations and policies** that get to the economics of the issue and also control the marketing of the unhealthy products are produced. Levers that help to influence the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy food and unhealthy food are utilised and pushed for.
5. **Universal basic income** could help to lift the economic position of the entire population and increase their ability to buy healthy food amongst increasing other social determinants of health that contribute to obesity and diet-related diseases.
6. **Less conventional actors are part of the solution** – such as urban development on how to incorporate the wellbeing and health of populations in decisions on developing urban areas and infrastructure. This will avoid certain areas being overrun with fast food outlets creating food deserts.



7. **Employers play a role** increasing the health of their employees. This could impact on large groups of the population if workplaces looked at the food their workforce was accessing and entered into procurement processes that increased the provision of healthy food to that workforce.
8. **The food industry**, who is a large employer, has employees who are educated about the importance of a healthy food environment and help shift the dial on this issue.
9. **Community initiatives** are effectively implemented. In the past community initiatives had limited reach and therefore their ability to make change was limited. However, the unique environment of COVID-19 showed us that local and regional actions can increase the food supply for populations and contrary to commonly held beliefs low income populations do buy healthy food if it is at a price point they can afford.
10. **We aren't clouded** by the current food system and long held beliefs about how low-income populations operate. We could take this opportunity to build more long-term sustainable community and regional efforts that shift the dial and disrupt the food system to change it from the bottom up.
11. **We cut out the problems** with the large international food trade system driven towards profit margin and create our own economies and food system that better serves the population's health and planet.
12. **We should look to other sectors** that have had success – what can we learn from tobacco? What can we learn from disruptive markets like Uber? We can create an alternative food source – that isn't seen as expensive / elitist food stores, but attainable at a community level.

What are the debates that we have identified and how can we manage this?

1. A common challenge is the food and beverage industry that produces highly processed food laden with sugar, salt and fat. Their focus is on increasing their profit margin not the health of the population or the planet. There has been limited government action on improving healthy environments because of a lack of political will, in part caused by the influence of the food and beverage industry.
2. To help overcome this challenge, we need to think of some disruptors that would help change the food system and food environments to improve cost and availability to a level that makes healthy food more accessible and unhealthy food less accessible. Mandatory regulation of the food and beverage industry to reduce their impact on unhealthy food environments is required to manage that influence and improve the food environments. The two approaches of top down and bottom up action could work concurrently and converge to finally move the dial on the unhealthy food environments. The main drivers of food choices are cost and convenience.

03. Conclusions Learnings from the FSD



03

The FSD

The FSD allowed many who do not normally have a voice in Aotearoa to speak out and drive the re-set in our national food system from the ground up. Being online made it more accessible and affordable for people who would not normally attend a conference. It allowed participants to identify and become aware of all the parts of our nationwide food system and how we connect into global food systems.

All sectors of our food system were represented so the network has a productive foundation to continue

working together and to attend any future FSD. There is also the opportunity for participants to take part in the global FSD quarterly calls.

Māori

Iwi, kuia, kaumatua and Māori food business people participated and also supported in creating the dialogue.

Another session with a focus on matauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) of food could be held to fairly represent the vast set of initiatives that are currently underway across Aotearoa by iwi, hapū and whānau.

We came together to discuss key issues in our food system, so what's next?

A National Food Strategy

There are multiple groups exploring or actively working on a national food strategy at this time. Cohesion is needed to bring the groups (and potentially their proposals) together.

A national food strategy is one approach that could assist but there are also many specific actions needed in order to create change on the ground across Aotearoa in our local and regional foodscapes. A national food strategy risks being taken over by vested interests and not representing the voice of people from across the food system if there is not a strong enough base line of work to go from locally.

Local food systems

Local or regional food systems require strengthening to adapt and be resilient in the face of crises, such as climate change and pandemics. A strong theme that emerged is the desire for, and backing of, local initiatives.

Collaboration

An alliance of groups from different sectors (farming, hospitality, business, health, not for profit, para kore etc.) would be useful to enable a combined civil society voice on the seven topics raised and to work together to make changes where there is agreement in those groups.

Climate change and resilience

A strong and resilient food system is seen as an essential, environmental issue. We need to support initiatives that ensure soil health, improve water quality, and reduce food waste as a way of combatting climate change. There is potential for Government's post-COVID-19 investment to be channeled into regenerative and sustainable food production.

Healthy and accessible food

Healthy food needs to be available to all. Large food and beverage companies should have less influence and a combination of bottom-up (e.g. employees being informed) and top-down (e.g. government regulation) approaches are needed. We also need to capture better data and re-establish the national nutritional survey.

Resources

Tools and strategies to achieve the proposals are missing. Organisations have some of the same intentions and ideas but lack the resources and time to make them happen. The role of central and local government here is to fund those working on this to enable them to effect change.

Multi-disciplinary approach

Food system work overlaps with other existing work, particularly in the health sector and also for poverty alleviation work. Suggestions such as increasing income sit across multiple sectors to solve challenges. Understanding the full food system is a useful way to see where mutual and beneficial change can occur.

04. Authors Facilitators

Thank you!

We extend our gratitude to: the participants who took part in this inaugural FSD; Dr David Nabarro and the 4SD Secretariat for its ongoing support; the facilitators for their time and to Jasmin Jackson and Lucia die Gil for helping on the day; Emily King for curating the event and bringing everyone together; and to Spira and AgRESTORE™ for their work introducing this event format to Aotearoa.



Emily King

Curator and lead author

Director of Spira, over 10 years working on global and national food system change. Emily brought the FSD to Aotearoa and believes that only by bringing people together from across the food system will we make change.



Anna Mayne

Facilitator

Co-Founder of AgRESTORE™ - an independent holistic environmental and economic impact monitoring service, benefiting farmers, growers, and consumers. Anna worked with Emily to bring the inaugural FSD to Aotearoa.



Scott Witters

Facilitator

A serial entrepreneur with extensive international experience in creating and fostering innovative and award-winning events, products and services.



Judith Hattie

Facilitator

Indigenous to Tainui Nation with a 37 year Nursing Career. Former Chair of the College of Primary Health Care Nurses of NZNO and Indigenous Nurse Rep of Greater Auckland Regional Council of Nurses.



Nikki Hart

Facilitator

UNA NZ member with a special advisory role for SDGs #goal2 #goal12. A skilled and highly regarded trained dietitian and NZ registered nutritionist with over 20 years' experience.



Tessa Vincent

Facilitator

Founded New Zealand Food Waste Champions 12.3 to combat food waste in New Zealand.



Fiona Sing

Facilitator

A global health law specialist, focusing on non-communicable diseases and how the food system can be improved to reduce diet-related diseases.



Angela Clifford

Facilitator

A food grower and the co-owner of a permaculture small farm called The Food Farm in North Canterbury. Leads the national food collective, Eat New Zealand.



Cultivating change in our food system

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Report by:
Spira, 2020