

# Kai anamata mō Te Taihū - a regional future food strategy

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**Research Area:** External shocks to Aotearoa-New Zealand's food system are increasing in frequency and severity and will escalate due to challenges like climate change. In response, and as part of a national 5-year research programme (2023-2028), a regional food system strategy for Te Taihū is being developed with a focus on economic, environmental, societal, and cultural wellbeing. Wakatū is a Hapū-owned organisation based in Te Taihū, representing more than 4,000 owners (Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Rārua, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Koata) and their whānau. Its 500-year intergenerational vision (Te Pae Tawhiti) focuses on reconnecting whānau to whenua and protecting and enhancing taonga for current and future generations. This project aligns key elements of the intergenerational strategy including whenua ora (land and water wellbeing), tangata ora (human wellbeing), and rawa ora (prosperity).

**Methods:** Our methods include case studies at two māra exploring tikanga-led land use opportunities with a focus on feeding whānau, and then the scalability of current, new, and indigenous species, implementing mātauranga-informed farming practices. Monitoring the performance of these crops and species as well as our practices against our Hōea ki Te Pae Tawhiti outcome framework is part of the project; this involves analysis of data across a holistic range of wellbeing outcome measures that map to Te Pae Tawhiti, which will feed into future decision-making and investment priorities. The development of our Te Taihū regional food system strategy will be aided by a food system model that is being developed jointly with Massey University to enable different land-use scenarios to be explored.

**Findings:** We present findings from a significant regional wānanga conducted in 2024 and from fieldwork focusing on testing indigenous crops as the first stage in building the evidence base for a food system strategy for the region. Fieldwork is informed by wānanga investigations focusing on how to translate tikanga-led regenerative farming on whenua Māori into practice in a sustainable and scalable manner. Production of current, new, and indigenous foods, in line with Te Pae Tawhiti and our Te Taihū regional strategy will provide knowledge-intensive employment, further connecting whānau to whenua.

**Contribution:** This ambitious and collaborative initiative contributes to the IIRC conference theme of research solidarities (Whitiki Taua) and empowers Māori to play an increasingly vital role in Aotearoa-New Zealand's food and fibre sector, as well as in policy decision-making. In developing a regional food strategy, the project contributes directly to the empowerment (whakamana) of whānau, hapū and Iwi while grounding the strategy in a Māori approach to wellbeing (hauora).

Stephens, Miriana

Miriana Stephens (Ngāti Rārua, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui) was born and raised in Motueka and is a Director of Wakatū Incorporation. Her research specialties integrate mātauranga Māori and science knowledge and champion intergenerational thinking. She also has a keen interest in intellectual property rights and reform, particularly pertaining to Wai 262 and the protection of mātauranga Māori. Miriana holds advisory roles with Government and an executive role with Wakatū leading the development of Māori-led research programmes with this being one example.