



CPAG 2023 Policy Brief on food security

# Ensure food security for all children

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## VISION

*All tamariki will grow up surrounded by loving, thriving whānau within supportive communities where there are resources, opportunities and systems to enable them to live self-determined lives and futures.*

CPAG acknowledges that tamariki Māori and whānau have unique rights as tangata whenua, affirmed within He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The significant inequities in well-being outcomes and child poverty for tamariki Māori are the result of ongoing colonisation, systemic racism and neglect. Reducing child poverty in Aotearoa requires our country to address the inequitable distribution of power and resources that prevents Māori from flourishing.

## ISSUES — THE CURRENT REALITY

No child in Aotearoa New Zealand should be deprived of the minimal nutrients and a diet needed for physical development due to a lack of resources. Yet they are. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2023 have drawn attention to this,<sup>1</sup> which is seen as a result of severe negligence by the state.

Eating nutritious food every day is a basic human need, and vital for child growth and development.<sup>2</sup> However, around one in seven children (13% to 17%) in Aotearoa New Zealand experience food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Food insecurity means that the state does not guarantee these children physical, social and economic access to sufficient food that meets their dietary needs for a healthy and active life.<sup>4</sup>

If a child's diet does not contain the required nutrients, they are at risk of malnutrition, under- and over-nourishment, and at higher risk of poor mental and physical health,<sup>5</sup> including diet-related diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.

The state often discriminates against and neglects neighbourhoods and communities to the point that over one-third of Pacific children (37%) and one-quarter of Māori children (26%) live in households that 'sometimes' or 'often' run out of food. For Pākehā and Asian children the figures are lower but still high (11% for Pākehā; 7% for Asian).<sup>6</sup>

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Children like these who are locked into poverty, at the highest risk of food insecurity, are the least likely to consume enough vegetables and fruit, and the most likely to lack dietary diversity.<sup>7</sup> Sole-parent families and families without paid work are more likely than other families to be in material hardship.<sup>8</sup> This includes being unable to afford suitable nutritious food. Caregivers use a range of strategies to mitigate these effects.<sup>9</sup> Mothers report sacrificing their own food so their children can eat well.<sup>10</sup>

## BARRIERS REQUIRING POLICY ACTIONS

For food security, a diverse range of wholesome foods need to be *available, accessible* (affordable, nearby and able to be stored) and *adequate* (nutritious and sufficient). In Aotearoa New Zealand, there are barriers to food security on all of these criteria, which the state has failed to dismantle:

**Availability:** New Zealand does not produce (or import) enough wholesome food (in particular, leafy green vegetables and whole grains) for everybody in the country to consume the recommended daily amount.<sup>11</sup> The food we do produce – including fruit, fat and protein – is primarily for export and not to ensure food security at home.<sup>12</sup> However even if we didn't export, we would not have enough of the high-quality and diverse foods required for health according to the Government's own guidelines.

**Accessibility and adequacy:** For many children in our country, adequate food is not affordable and affordable food is not nutritionally adequate.<sup>13</sup> Affordability is getting worse. Statistics New Zealand recorded, in 2023, the largest annual food price increase for more than 30 years (12.1% in the year to March 2023), with the price of fruit and vegetables increasing by 22% in the same period.<sup>14</sup> The resounding message from children themselves is that "healthy food should be cheaper".<sup>15</sup>

While children go hungry, supermarkets receive around \$1 million a day in *excess profits* (~\$365M to \$430M a year).<sup>16</sup> Government response to the Commerce Commission's findings on the supermarket duopoly are too slow. Food security is too important to be left to the mercy of the markets, even if there were no profiteering – and yet, this is what the state is doing.

The inequitably higher rates of food insecurity for Pacific children are related to Pacific workers receiving extremely low incomes (particularly, but not only, Pacific women).<sup>17</sup> This is mostly due to unquantifiable factors such as bias and discrimination rather than job-related characteristics and education gaps.<sup>18</sup>

Among Māori the inequitably higher rates of food insecurity are linked to neo-liberalism, racism,<sup>19</sup> and ongoing practices of colonisation.<sup>19</sup> Together, these have removed many resources from whānau Māori, including land and water, which are directly required for food sovereignty, as well as traditional methods of cultivation and food preparation.<sup>20</sup> Māori community organisations and marae-based support have prevented food insecurity due to systemic state neglect from becoming even worse.<sup>21</sup>

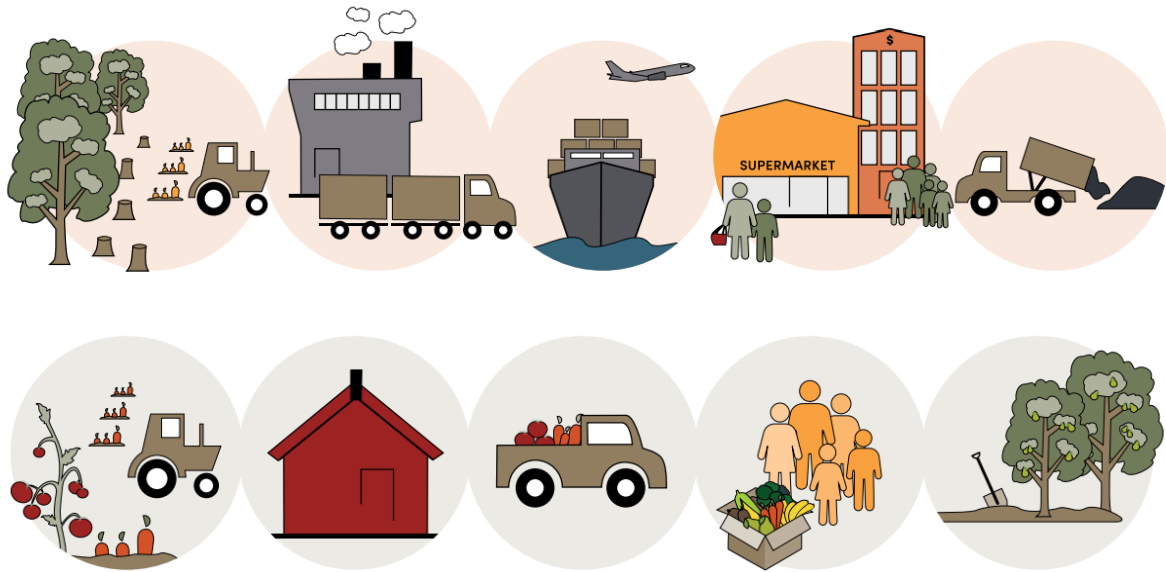
In addition to food being unaffordable, food distribution systems are not resilient enough to ensure that New Zealanders have a continuous food supply that is able to meet the food-

based dietary guidelines of the Ministry of Health,<sup>22</sup> including in times of emergency, crisis and disaster.

With more than 30 government entities involved with food policies and provision,<sup>23</sup> increasing food security and coordination is a challenge. Aotearoa New Zealand is currently lacking a sorely-needed national food security strategy to coordinate policies across local and national governing bodies for everybody involved in the food chain.

### **Current Government responses**

- To address increasing food costs and address the supermarket duopoly, the Government decided in June 2022 to establish a new position of Grocery Commissioner, to sit within the Commerce Commission, but an appointment has not yet been made. This Commissioner will have the power to impose new regulations if the two supermarket chains do not act in good faith as wholesalers.<sup>24</sup> This is a positive move but it is unclear whether this will be enough to stop profiteering.
- The Government contributes financially to community food distribution organisations, and local foodbanks.<sup>25</sup> These are commendable “stop-gap” measures to address the current crisis, but approaches to food insecurity need to move to wider, long-term solutions.<sup>26</sup> In particular, having to rely on charity and foodbanks for meals does not uphold people’s mana, allow them dignity, enable food choice, or support specific dietary requirements.<sup>27</sup> In addition, via the current charitable set-up, the state is reliant on volunteer time and community goodwill. This approach is exploitative and fails to uphold basic human rights. For example, the emotional labour involved for volunteers in deciding who to prioritise when food parcel demand outstrips supply is exhausting.<sup>28</sup> Food provisioning programmes need to have a rights-based, ethical community-engagement approach.<sup>29</sup>
- The Government also contributes to [fruit in schools](#), and [healthy school lunch](#) (Ka Ora, Ka Ako) programmes in low-decile schools. This is commendable and has positive effects. However, school-based programmes pause during weekends, the school holidays and COVID-19 lockdowns, and therefore food runs out for families: foodbank usage doubles or more in December.<sup>30</sup> Neither programme currently extends into the early childhood care and education sector. Furthermore, the *Growing Up in New Zealand* longitudinal study found that in their cohort at age 12 (interviewed from October 2021), half of the young people living in moderately-food-insecure households, and a third of those living in severely-food-insecure households, did not receive Ka Ora, Ka Ako (in the past year). This will primarily be due to the restriction to schools serving very disadvantaged areas.<sup>31</sup>



Illustrations reproduced from [Realising Food Secure Communities in Aotearoa \(Kore Hiakai, 2023\)](#)  
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## RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTIONS

Remove barriers to food security, including profit-driven industrial food systems detrimental to the environment, over-regulation of local food, and high living costs.

In order to create an Aotearoa New Zealand where kaitiakitanga of mana whenua and mātauranga Māori is respected, sustainable local food economies need to be supported and people have enough income to supply their own good food.

We support the Kore Hiakai collective of food-related charities which urge strategies and policies to encourage local, sustainable food systems, uphold mātauranga Māori and shift power away from the corporate food industry.<sup>32</sup>

Our recommendations are consistent with the call in the Taitamariki Youth Declaration for “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.

We call for decision-makers to support spaces where food security is prioritised for youth, for example places such as the [Whenua Warrior](#) in Auckland”.<sup>33</sup>

### 1. Address the availability and accessibility of food

- **Work with Iwi, hapū and local communities to develop regional and national food security policies and strategies.** Ensure Māori voices and values are central within the policy-making processes related to food availability and that the process gives full expression to rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.<sup>34</sup>
- **Ensure children most at risk of food insecurity (those in material hardship) are prioritised.**
- **Encourage local food distribution.** Investigate the possibility of using state sector procurement rules to encourage ethical and local food distribution and supply chains (for example, for food in schools programmes and hospital catering).

- **Develop specific policies and strategies** to address the following:
  - Build and maintain accessible food distribution systems that encourage locally sourced and affordable foods from producers.
  - Prioritise national food security over exports and reduce reliance on the supermarket duopoly.
  - Increase the ability of non-supermarkets to supply, distribute and sell food e.g. farmers markets, community gardens.
  - Support growers and fishers to supply locally – short distribution chains and independent food outlets.

### ***2. Address the affordability of food***

- **Ensure that prices are not artificially inflated.** The recommended distribution systems (above) will assist with this.
- **Ensure liveable incomes** to assist all low income families of all ethnicities. See CPAG 2023 Policy Briefs at [www.cpag.org.nz/policybriefs](http://www.cpag.org.nz/policybriefs); and the Human Rights Commission’s Pacific Pay Equity recommendations.<sup>35</sup>

### ***3. Address the adequacy of food***

This is the backstop: making sure nutritious food is available even to those without financial resources. For example:

- Ensure that state support for the first 1000 days of a child’s life includes ensuring food security for the pregnant mother, child and whānau.
- Support foodbanks to follow the national guidelines for healthy food provision in the distribution of food parcels.<sup>36</sup>
- Continue (i) Ka Ora, Ka Ako (the food in schools programme) and (ii) the fruit in schools programme, and offer both programmes to all schools, and to all those preschools which are (i) community-based, (ii) low-cost for families, compared with industry standard, and (iii) fully compliant with all Ministry of Education regulations.<sup>37</sup>
- Fund food programmes in the school holidays to ensure there is no “food gap” for children when schools are closed.
- Ensure that the Ministry of Health food-based dietary guidelines<sup>38</sup> are supported in all policies that involve the food system; and that all schools follow the Ka Ora, Ka Ako nutrition standards,<sup>39</sup> whether or not they receive the programme.

## IMPACTS AND INDICATORS

If implemented, these actions would be steps towards moving Aotearoa to be a nation where all children and families flourish free from poverty.

- The initial indicator should be food equity – Māori and all ethnicities to have equitable access to nutritious food, and food security (as reported by the Child Poverty Monitor).
- The ultimate impact of these actions will be food security for all children. (NZ Health Survey; NZ Household Economic Survey).

No child in Aotearoa New Zealand, in this land of plenty, should go hungry or be malnourished. It is within our power to make sure it doesn't happen. Ensuring food security for all children is an essential step towards

- The Crown addressing the Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.
- New Zealand meeting its targets for UN Sustainable Development Goal 1: “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”; Goal 2: “End hunger”; Goal 3: “Good health and well-being”; and Goal 10: “Reduce inequality”.<sup>40</sup>
- New Zealand meeting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 24 and 27.<sup>41</sup>
- The national vision “that New Zealand be the best place in the world for children and young people”.<sup>42</sup>

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