



PRODUCING KAI IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF OUR FOREBEARS

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY

COVER IMAGE: KIWIFRUIT SLICE



WE WENT INTO KIWIFRUIT AND WERE ABLE TO PRODUCE KIWIFRUIT USING THE SAME TIKANGA, IN THE SAME FOOTPRINT AS OUR FOREBEARS, AND WE PRODUCED KIWIFRUIT A LOT EARLIER THAN EVERYBODY ELSE. (RATAHI CROSS, 2018)

Ratahi Cross, chairman of Ngāi Tukairangi Trust and Te Awanui Huka Pak, 2018

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

Ratahi Cross is chairman of Ngāi Tukairangi Trust, the biggest Māori kiwifruit grower in the country, as well as chair of Te Awanui Huka Pak, a collective of nineteen Māori trusts founded in 1984 who principally grow kiwifruit in the western Bay of Plenty. Te Awanui Huka Pak is the largest collective of Māori growers in the industry. It is 100% Māori owned and operated and is located in Mount Maunganui. On the Matapihi Peninsula you will not find high-density urban housing, but green fields with hectares of kiwifruit growing in the same soils that have traditionally produced kai for peoples in this region. Ratahi tells us of the strategy devised by his tūpuna to join Māori land blocks together and cultivate a product that could combat urban sprawl. The success of this strategy can be seen today in the cultivation blocks that prevail on the peninsula, as well as the Te Awanui Huka Pak collective. Kiwifruit is a lucrative market despite precarity in its early years, and growers in the Bay of Plenty region benefit from a climate that enables early marketing of the fruit. Below is a snapshot of Ratahi’s whakaaro on a range of topics to do with land, water and tangata relations.



Ngāi Tukairangi Trust’s Bay of Plenty orchards

HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA AND WHAKAPAPA

The early start to harvest enjoyed by Te Awanui Huka Pak today, continues a long tradition in this region of a longer-than-usual food production time frame born of the warm climate, volcanic soils and good water access.

So, if you were able to grow and be producing food at about the three-quarter mark of winter, you had good stocks all the way through summer. You had stocks to store for the following winter and so these particular lands became very, very precious. You look around here, you look at these lands and you look at Matapihi, you look at Katikati, you look at Pirirākau across there at Te Puna, you look at the islands Rangiwaia and Matakana, and if you look back in history, they're traditionally growing areas. They've been producers of kai for our people.

For Ratahi Cross, having an enduring understanding of the whenua you hold mana over, is the first and most necessary step toward kaitiakitanga. Ratahi invites us to think about how kaitiakitanga is often cited, on a range of levels, including at the level of iwi, hapū and mana whenua. At times there is a disjunct between iwi entities who engage with the principle of kaitiakitanga and those who actually own the land, and who have long-standing knowledge of the land. Ratahi recounts a conversation with his grandfather by the side of a river at night time, who asked him to listen to what the river was saying. Ratahi replied:

"It's just running". And [his grandfather] goes "what do you think it's saying?", "I don't know you've lost me". And he goes "it's telling you what its story is



KIWIFRUIT ON THE VINE

inside its river bed". And I'd go "why?". He said, the different sounds are the voices of the river talking about those particular rocks that are in its way, that are impeding it and they make different sounds. [...] So, nature talks to you whether it's dark or light, it talks to you.

Knowing the land and water, and listening to, and understanding the land and water, is a crucial component of kaitiakitanga, as Ratahi explains:

When I was young my grandfather said to me "moko", "yeah papa", "how many ngārara under that clump of grass over there?", "aua I don't know" and he said "until you know how many ngārara are there, what their life is, how well that plant looks in different parts of its life, what colour it is, this is never going to be your land". I said "why?" and he said "because to understand and care for something, you need to know it in its entirety. And when you don't know it in its entirety, then you're not a kaitiaki. And so, using that principle, Māori are very, very shallow kaitiaki nowadays. They don't know it in depth as they used to.

This kind of land-based knowledge is intimately tied to whakapapa, which is something that means a great deal more than simply genealogy. Describing Māori as waka people who have migrated in most parts to these islands, Ratahi refutes the idea of a primordial link to Papatūānuku.

You hear out there, "I am one with the land, it's always been mine" and then you ask that person "prove it's always been yours, you tell me the proof? Tell me where your whakapapa established you to the land you're on now?". There is no establishment. There's a whole difference from descending from Papatūānuku than there is from descending from that particular whenua. The majority of our people have conquered our whenua off other people or we have broken it in as new. So, when we start playing with whakapapa, we play with whakapapa the

same way that Pākehā use genealogy. [...] For us, our whakapapa is a lot deeper. Our whakapapa is about all the tools that were handed down. That's the whakapapa to the land, it's all the tikanga - tikanga makes kaitiakitanga. So, if I do things right, I'm going to survive and I'm going to add to the list of tools, the recipes that I hand down and that's the real value of whakapapa. That's kaitiakitanga.

A MĀORI FOOD STORY?

While the New Zealand food and drink sector often talk about a "New Zealand Food Story" Ratahi questions what a Māori version of this food story might look like. Kiwifruit is not an indigenous product and hence a difficult product to story as "Māori". Ratahi thinks organic food could lend itself well to a Māori food story given its attention to environmental impacts and the careful treatment of whenua. As for those fishing entities that attempt to tell a Māori story, Ratahi has this to say:

There's nothing Māori in there that I see except this is a Māori-owned product - we want to export it and sell it to you as a Māori-owned product. It doesn't fit in my thinking and it's the same in sheep and beef. What's the Māori story? What is the Māori story about it, again a product that's not ours? Again, a product that's destructive of the environment and yet we still try and sell a Māori story about it. I don't understand that.

Ratahi's kōrero invites us to think more carefully about the various uses of the term kaitiakitanga, and to consider closely what is "māori" about a Māori food story. His kōrero also shines light on the ways in which we can rethink our everyday practices by being more attentive, engaged and responsive to the lands and waters that surround us.



Top: Close-up of Ngāi Tukairangi Trust's Bay of Plenty Orchards Base: Kiwifruit Flower Right: Mauao (Mt Maunganui), of Tauranga Moana Iwi



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See [our website](#) for more info on the Storying Kaitiakitanga project.

HE AHA TE MEA NUI O TE AO HE TANGATA, HE TANGATA, HE TANGATA

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