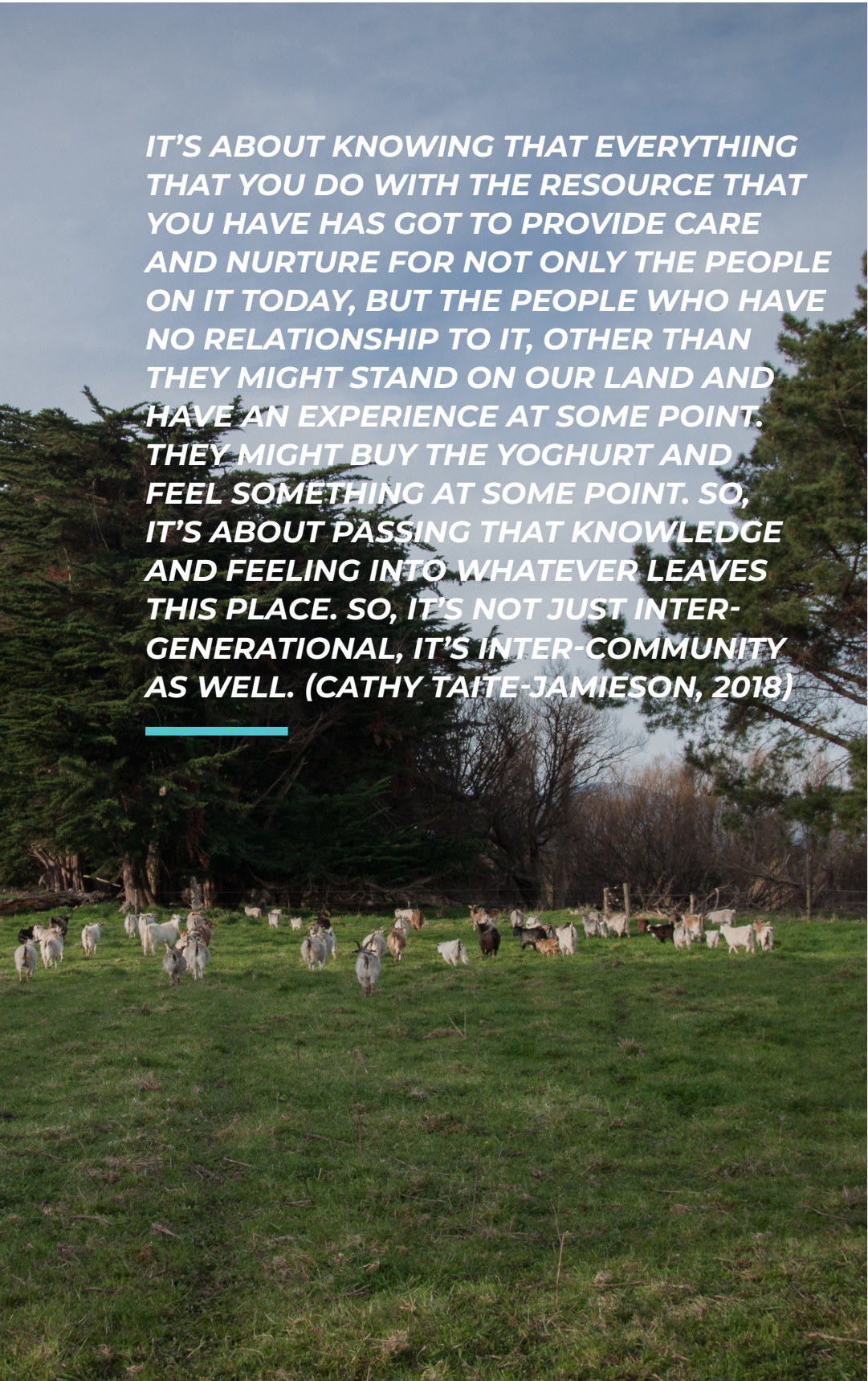




DAIRY FARMING WITH NATURE IN THE MANAWATŪ

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY



IT'S ABOUT KNOWING THAT EVERYTHING THAT YOU DO WITH THE RESOURCE THAT YOU HAVE HAS GOT TO PROVIDE CARE AND NURTURE FOR NOT ONLY THE PEOPLE ON IT TODAY, BUT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO RELATIONSHIP TO IT, OTHER THAN THEY MIGHT STAND ON OUR LAND AND HAVE AN EXPERIENCE AT SOME POINT. THEY MIGHT BUY THE YOGHURT AND FEEL SOMETHING AT SOME POINT. SO, IT'S ABOUT PASSING THAT KNOWLEDGE AND FEELING INTO WHATEVER LEAVES THIS PLACE. SO, IT'S NOT JUST INTER-GENERATIONAL, IT'S INTER-COMMUNITY AS WELL. (CATHY TAITE-JAMIESON, 2018)

Diversity on the land, August 2018

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

At a time when dairy farming in Aotearoa is struggling to maintain its social licence to practice due to its impact on the environment, how do you work *with* nature, to produce dairy-based products? One solution is to develop a niche product that provides a good gross return at a scale that is sustainable, using methods that enrich the land base. Owner and instigator of the *BioFarm* brand, Cathy Taite-Jamieson (Ngāti Tukorehe) has been successfully making organic yoghurt with her husband Jamie, since 1987, on their farm just outside of Palmerston North. Her whenua is organic, has been biodynamic and her farm was the first Hua Parakore verified farm by Te Waka Kai Ora.¹ With her products on sale in supermarkets across the country, as well as at times in Australia, people often imagine this kind of distribution means that Cathy is connected to a large marketing company. Yet *BioFarm's* distinctiveness is that it produces both raw milk and the finished organic product on the same farm and it only milks around one hundred cows daily. The house which features on *BioFarm's* logo is the old Whakarongo School house which is now part of the farm and the site where her four children were home-schooled. The tag-line attached to *BioFarm* reads “farming for life” and demonstrates Cathy's approach to the dairy industry as an interconnected process with life-giving dimensions, an approach that many can learn from.



Kaitiakitanga hero, Cathy Taite-Jamieson, August 2018

HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA VALUES



At the milking shed, August 2018

It's about knowing that everything that you do with the resource that you have has got to provide care and nurture for not only the people on it today, but the people who have no relationship to it, other than they might stand on our land and have an experience at some point. They might buy the yoghurt and feel something at some point. So, it's about passing that knowledge and feeling into whatever leaves this place. So, it's not just inter-generational, it's inter-community as well. (Cathy Taite-Jamieson, 2018)

Cathy and Jamie were early proponents of Rudolph Steiner's philosophy of biodynamic agriculture which understands soils, plants and livestock as part of a single system linked to the stars, seasons and cosmic forces. Such an approach chimed

well with Cathy's understanding of things Māori and the importance of the stars and the moon in Māori food growing practices. In the quote above, Cathy describes farming and the production of yoghurt as a conduit which links the whenua to the consumer and to everything beyond. This provides a very different way of looking at farming activities. For Cathy, kaitiakitanga is more than leaving the environment in a condition better than that which you found it in. As Cathy states, "kaitiakitanga is also about what we can do for others. It is about the relationships that come from the connections and feelings to place and the products that are produced from that place". She describes this process as being "consciously tuned in". When giving public talks on her practices Cathy sometimes encounters members of

the public who cannot make these kinds of connections easily:

People used to come up to me after [a public talk] and say "You're very religious aren't you?". Because I was actually talking about reverence of the land, the water, the animals, the food that you're providing for the communities. That wasn't seen in the same context as the businesses that they were running. So, they would complain about not being able to swim in the awa anymore, like they did when they were children, but they couldn't marry that to their farming practices.

ALTERNATE PRODUCTION PARADIGMS

The success of *BioFarm* demonstrates how being bigger is not always better. Turning their milk into yoghurt on their own farm, rather than following the low-value dairy commodity model, means that *BioFarm* is independent from the price from a dairy company. Indeed, the pervasiveness of their products (on display in supermarkets across Aotearoa) belies the modest scale of their operation. Cathy recounts the disbelief she has experienced when she tells other farmers as well as Māori Incorporations that they only milk around one hundred cows once a day:

We only have to milk that many to pay the same mortgage as our Iwi Incorporation Farm who have the same land size. They're milking six hundred cows, which makes you realise how much milk New Zealand pumps out. It doesn't matter how much we say it, or try and portray it, it just doesn't compute. There is still this idea that we have got to be big. The conventional farming industry is not resilient to climate, they are not resilient to milk prices that they get and they are not resilient to animal health issues. So, it's a completely different

paradigm. And I'm on our Iwi Incorporation Farm Board and there is zero interest in what we do. Zero.

This alternate paradigm includes fostering biodiversity and being an active companion with the landscape and waterways, operating with the rhythms of nature. Cathy and Jamie bring in diverse species to deal with weed problems, pests and diseases. Their sheep, goats and cows all co-mingle on the farm. They don't have sheep blocks or goat blocks or cow blocks. This means that they don't have to spray for any weeds, they don't have fungal problems or parasites on the stock because one species is continually back grazing what they've already grazed. In terms of animal health she tells us:

If they're a bit sick we might drench with molasses but there's no [regular] drenching. There's no yarding of young stock, so they come off their mums and they don't see a yard until they calve. They don't have to be yarded for anything. We don't have motorbikes, we move stock by foot. So, they know you. You're in the paddock, you're calling them, and they follow you. So, we have a relationship [with our livestock] from the time they're born really.

CHALLENGES

When Cathy and Jamie first entered the farming industry, they found it difficult to be different and to pursue an organics approach. Today, their differences have paid off, particularly notable at a time when dairy farming is experiencing "perception issues". *BioFarm's* brand integrity and small-scale organic production methods could be the difference the dairy industry needs. Yet, as Cathy's earlier quote suggests, changing how dairying is done by both Māori and non-Māori entities alike, remains a persisting challenge.



Scenes from the Biofarm operation, August 2018



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

¹ Hua Parakore is a Māori organics certification and validation system run by Te Waka Kai Ora (National Māori Organics Authority).

KA RERE NGĀ PURAPURA A MATARIKI THE SEEDS OF MATARIKI ARE FALLING

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OUR LAND
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,
Toiora te Wai

National
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