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Ritchie, Isa 2016. Food Sovereignty in Whaingaroa: Perspectives of Food Providers in a Small, Coastal New Zealand Township. *Anthropological Forum*, 26(3): 289-300.

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Food Sovereignty in Whaingaroa: Perspectives of Food Providers in a Small, Coastal New Zealand Township

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Abstract

Food sovereignty has been the focus of much academic attention in recent years, in both the global South and the North. As yet, very little research has been published exploring food sovereignty in a New Zealand context. This article presents some preliminary findings from my doctoral research, which has focussed on food sovereignty in New Zealand. Data were gathered through ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with people who produce, organise and distribute local food. I examine how various conceptions of food sovereignty are being enacted in a, small coastal town in rural New Zealand. This article argues that despite the general absence of the term 'food sovereignty' in this community, many practices, foci, and values associated with the global food sovereignty campaign resonate with local food providers, including the significance placed on indigenous Māori values. This is indicative of food sovereignty as a spontaneous grass-roots movement that springs forth from the needs of a community, rather than being imposed from the top-down.

Keywords: Food Sovereignty, New Zealand, Local food, Localisation, Food ethics

Introduction

In recent years we have seen a growing awareness regarding social, cultural, environmental and ethical problems associated with the global corporate food system (Germov and Williams 2009; Mason and Singer 2006). In response, grass-roots initiatives have emerged focussed on producing or redistributing food locally. These can be seen as part of a broader social movement toward food sovereignty (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009, 2). This concept and the movement were initially sparked in the mid-1990s by *Vía Campesina*, an international peasant movement representing more than 180 organisations advocating for migrant workers, landless peasants and small farm owners (Wittman 2009, 805; Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2011, 3).

According to the Declaration of Nyéléni (2007), which came out of a global forum on food sovereignty, foundational notions of food sovereignty include: giving people the right to produce their own food; valuing community food providers; encouraging local sustainable food systems; giving control over land and resources to communities rather than corporate interests; building knowledge and skills within communities; and valuing diverse eco-systems (Rose 2013). Food sovereignty is presented in much of the academic literature as a potentially radical and powerful critique of the neoliberal discourses that underpin the contemporary practices of the corporate capitalist food industry. It also provides alternative models for agriculture that are intended to be more environmentally and socially just (Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2011).

Much of the literature on food sovereignty focusses on the global South, particularly Latin America (Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2011). However, food sovereignty as a movement has also been active in the global North. While there has been considerable contemporary research into community gardens in the United States (Alkon & Mares 2012, Flachs 2010), many other activities, organisations and practices that could be considered part of the wider food sovereignty movement, especially as they relate to global North nations, have yet to be explored to the same extent. These include seed banks, food foraging networks, land sharing and ‘WWOOFing’ (“Willing Workers on Organic Farms”, who exchange their labour for accommodation and food). In the New Zealand context the literature that documents food sovereignty practices is particularly sparse. My doctoral research was designed to begin to address this deficit through ethnographic enquiry centred on Whaingaroa, a small coastal township. The key informants are all involved with local food production and distribution; furthermore, it is central to their lifestyles and livelihoods.

This article begins with an overview of the academic literature focussed on food sovereignty in New Zealand, highlighting several relevant articles. As this literature is so sparse, a broader geographical range is drawn upon to provide evidence of the growing movement related to food sovereignty. Following this is a description of the Whaingaroa¹ community and the activities relating to food sovereignty which are being enacted there. The last section

¹ Whaingaroa is the frequently used Māori name for Raglan, and also refers to the wider area surrounding the harbour. It is the preferred name for the area in this research, and in much of the community.

is focussed on values and tensions within the community of food producers that can be seen to reflect those of the wider food sovereignty movement.

I have lived in the Whaingaroa area since 2011, before the official commencement of this research, and have had numerous connections with the area for many years. Informants were sourced through already-established acquaintances and through their suggestions of other suitable local food providers. Data have been gathered through participant observation during meetings and community gardening activities, as well as general community participation, and through in-depth interviews, between 2013 and 2014. Informants included *Tangata Whenua* [Māori people indigenous to this particular area]² food providers, as well as *Tau Iwi* [indigenous to other areas of New Zealand], and Pākehā [non-indigenous] food providers. Some pseudonyms have been used in line with the preferences of informants.

Food Sovereignty in New Zealand

Despite a large and growing body of international food sovereignty literature, when I first began this research in 2012, I could not find any New Zealand-based publications focussed explicitly on ‘food sovereignty’ aside from a brief mention in relation to food regimes (Roche 2012). Since then it has been the focus of several articles. Hutchings et al. (2013) discuss food sovereignty in relation to ‘Hua Parakore’, the certification system provided by the Māori organics association, Te Waka Kai Ora (Hutchings et al. 2013). They argue convincingly that Te Waka Kai Ora is contributing to the wider food sovereignty movement and draw connections between Hua Parakore and the Western-based organics systems in New Zealand, as well as the international Slow Food movement. Hutchings et al. (2013) frame this group as an expression of indigenous food sovereignty, which is making a key contribution to indigenous organic food producers in New Zealand, as well as representing Māori food sovereignty at an international level and responding to the ‘global triple crisis’ of climate change, peak oil and food insecurity:

Hua Parakore is a development opportunity in the form of an indigenous food sovereignty initiative that seeks to address and respond to this triple crisis from a *kaupapa Māori* [Māori philosophical] framework and assert *rangatiratanga* [self-determination] with regard to food production. Critical within this Hua Parakore framed response to the triple crisis is the reassertion within Māori tribal collectives to save and protect traditional seed from commodification and to return to the land to grow food to feed families. (Hutchings et al. 2013, 133)

This article states that strengthening relationships between the Māori and non-Māori organics sectors has broadened the paradigm of organics in New Zealand and that, although they are based on different epistemologies, they are both holistic paradigms for food production which include a focus on ecosystems, soil, biodiversity, and animal welfare, as well as resistance to genetic modification, nanotechnology, and chemical herbicides and pesticides. The resistance

² Approximate translations for Māori words are provided in square brackets for ease of interpretation, sourced from my background as a native language speaker. The complexity of the meanings of these words is such that they cannot be described completely in the confines of this article.

to genetic modification among Te Waka Kai Ora members includes concerns over risks to human health, traditional farming and biodiversity, as well as intellectual and cultural property right issues (Hutchings et al. 2013). This resistance is integral to the organisation:

The development of Hua Parakore is not only about supporting Māori well-being though the commercial, community and home-growing of Hua Parakore food and products, but it is also a means by which to demonstrate resistance to biopiracy, GM and neo-liberal free trade policies which continue to act as a vehicle to displace and colonise indigenous peoples globally (2013, 132)

In another article focussed on food sovereignty in New Zealand, Rosin (2014), approaches this topic from a human geography perspective, as an example of potentially transformative utopian politics. He points out that the country's export-oriented agriculture, rooted in colonial history, means that an excess of food is produced, rendering food security of little concern at a national level. He also states that food sovereignty does not fit well within the dominant food production paradigm, despite the reality of food scarcity for some economically vulnerable populations, and that these situations in New Zealand are mistakenly treated as discrete and localised problems. He argues for the importance of utopian scholarship in re-imagining a food system that is just, fair, secure and abundant and supports the production of safe, nutritious and culturally valued food.

In her recent book *Food@home*, academic and journalist Christine Dann (2012) describes many grassroots initiatives and activities in New Zealand that are also evident in the food sovereignty movement, although she does not explicitly use the term. These include community gardening, Māra Māori [traditional Māori gardening], food foraging, seed-saving and sustainable small-holders. Dann refers to the food transformations occurring in New Zealand communities in her preface:

A food evolution is taking place in New Zealand. Right now, right here, new ways of producing, preparing and sharing food are slowly being established. Some of the new ways are not too different from some of the good old ways, which have been displaced over the past century by the industrial food system... It's time to move on to something better. (2012, 9)

This statement, and much of Dann's book, can be seen as resonating with the concept and movement of food sovereignty in their intentions as well as their motivations, and can be considered part of a general global movement towards food sovereignty (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009, 2).

Food sovereignty, though not usually part of the dominant discourse in New Zealand, was mentioned in relation to recent revisions to the parliamentary Food Bill (2014). A lobby group, *The Food Bill Issues List*, challenged the Food Bill, claiming that the proposed legislation would 'make fundamental changes to New Zealand's food supply and food sovereignty' (Foodbill.org 2012, 1). Issues were raised around the potential threat to food sovereignty posed by the legislation through restricting practices such as 'WOOOFing', seed

saving and gifting food, including garden produce. This lobby group asserted that the proposed legislation was designed to appeal to international trade agreements, to the detriment of the public good. This was picked up by national media; while the Bill was topical, before it was passed in mid-2013, the term ‘food sovereignty’ was regularly mentioned on news bulletins on the public broadcast station, Radio New Zealand National (2013). However, in this discourse the use of the term was applied in a different sense, as the Food Bill was described as a potential threat to New Zealand food sovereignty. This use of ‘food sovereignty’ differs from its general use in the literature that ascribes aspirational qualities to the term. In positioning the Bill as a threat, there is an assumption that ‘food sovereignty’ is something New Zealand already possessed, rather than something to move towards.

The Community: Whaingaroa by the Sea

Whaingaroa is located on the west coast of the central North Island of New Zealand, nestled beneath Mt Karioi (Te Ara 2011). The township, in many ways, resembles a typical New Zealand sea-side holiday settlement clustered between the hills with its modest holiday homes, painted in pastel-coloured weatherboard among more modern concrete and glass constructions. Its quaint town centre is primarily located on a short stretch of the main street. It is known as an international surfing destination (Corner 2008, 3), a popular holiday spot for New Zealanders, and is home to a number of commuters who work in the nearby city of Hamilton (Te Ara 2011). The winter population of the township is estimated to be around 3,000, and the summer population at 10,500, largely due to holiday makers (Corner 2008, 3). This summer influx helps to support local businesses that struggle during the winter months. Whaingaroa is frequented by travellers or semi-permanent international expatriates. These transient ‘internationals’ are often European, North American or South American. They have an obvious influence on the cultural landscape of the township and surrounding area, lending, to what would otherwise be an isolated small town, a more cosmopolitan atmosphere. Its geographic isolation lends a ‘cul-de-sac’ quality to the town. Whaingaroa is seen to be ‘at the end of the road’, not being on the way to anywhere else in particular. Because of the absence of through-traffic there are few corporate franchises and no corporate fast-food outlets. This isolation, along with beaches and scenic views, shares attributes with other New Zealand locations, such as Waiheke Island, the west side of the Coromandel Peninsula, and Golden Bay, which are also known for their ‘alternative’, creative counter-cultures.

There are several Tangata Whenua groups belonging to the area. The most central *hapu*, Tainui a Whiro, has a long history of independence and activism which is connected to the history of Māori rights activism in New Zealand. This, particularly the political and community activism of Eva Rickard (Te Ara, 2012), can be seen to have influenced the culture of Whaingaroa. Several participants in this research spoke of Eva’s influence on their lives and activism. Her legacy, as well as the surrounding activism of indigenous people in this area, is a subject worthy of further research.

The population of Whaingaroa comprises a wide variety of overlapping subcultural groups. Because the small town has a limited supply and range of employment opportunities, many

residents commute to the nearby city of Hamilton. Overlapping with these working groups is the large number of young families, whose incomes and education levels vary widely. There is also a sizeable population of older generation retirees who congregate at the Light Exercise Group, the Horticultural Society, the Museum Society and The Club. Some have lived here for most of their lives, whilst others have deliberately retired to the seaside.

There is a richness to the small township that goes well beyond its modest financial prosperity. People who have relatively low incomes are often able to attain a quality of life that is more dependent on relationships, community activities and creative pursuits than just on financial means. Whaingaroa has a reputation for being progressive with its art, recycling, environmental and local food initiatives, but this is largely a recent development. Twenty years ago, aside from being a surfing destination, it was much like any other small seaside town. There are numerous complex factors that have led to these developments.

Geographically, Whaingaroa is on the wilder west-coast of the North Island which is slightly less desirable for wealthy holiday-home owners who tend to prefer the east-coast's white sandy beaches rather than black iron sand. A council initiative to purchase prime land that had been proposed for development led to the creation of the Wainui Reserve, thus saving the land from being used for luxury beach houses. The township also experienced early development of trendy cafés generating a café-culture – more recently augmented by the active presence of the local coffee roastery. Alongside these factors, the polluted state of the harbour led to the formation, in the late 1990s, of Whaingaroa Harbourcare, a group that has facilitated the replanting of waterways, yielding significant results and bringing together a handful of environmentally conscious people who have been involved in other groups and projects, including the Xtreme Waste Recycling Centre, a community oriented non-profit business focussed on sustainability. One of their recent projects is a trial of organic waste recycling of food scraps.

On arrival at the town via the main road from Hamilton, the first signs of the township are several new subdivisions that encroach on surrounding farmland. Just beyond these is the top of the main street, notable for its tall phoenix palms set in a row down the grassy median strip, which descends down-hill, past war memorials, towards a view of the harbour inlet. From a glimpse of the main street, local food is all but invisible. Closer inspection of the town, however, yields evidence of more local produce: on the menu at several cafés; in the 'tiny tiny' bread shop, selling locally made sourdough bread; the Herbal Dispensary; the locally roasted coffee, and the pizzeria and gelato shop, previously the Whaingaroa West dairy, which has recently started experimenting with making and selling speciality cheese made from local organic milk.

Behind these and other local food projects are numerous interconnected groups and individuals. Kaiwhenua Organics, run by Kaiwaka and Lynn, sells locally produced organic fruit and vegetables and is part of the national Māori organic organisation Te Waka Kai Ora. Taunga Kereru, also known as 'Liz and Rick's', is a small permaculture farm hosting WWOOFers, which sometimes offers apprenticeships, and holds weekly community gardening days. Liz and Rick's stall at the monthly Creative Market is a regular feature,

including their vegetables and locally famous pesto. Solscape, an eco-retreat, also hosts WWOOFers and occasionally runs permaculture and sustainability courses. Solscape is also closely connected with local activism against seabed mining.

Whaingaroa boasts an abundance of community economies and alternative economic activity. Alongside the prevalence of the gifting of surplus fish and hunted wild meat, especially pork, there are several community gardening initiatives in Whaingaroa that are open to the community and produce is publicly accessible. One, on the grounds of the local police station, was set up to encourage connections between the police and the community. Another is a 'food forest', so named because it incorporates permaculture principles to balance fruit trees with food-producing shrubs and vegetables imitating a forest arrangement. This has been planted on public land in a series of six circular gardens. The Whaingaroa Environment Centre is involved in various community-based initiatives, including: organising the annual fundraising event, Maui's Dolphin Day; hosting a seed bank, where seeds can be swapped and bought inexpensively; and running the time bank, part of an international community economy system in which time is the medium of exchange and everyone's time is valued equally. 'WWOOFing', the practice of exchanging labour on organic farms for food and accommodation, is also common in Whaingaroa. There are several local instances of 'land sharing' as well, where people who own land allow others to garden, and sometimes to live, on their property and the garden produce is shared. These examples can be seen as part of a complex and diverse community economy functioning alongside, and interacting with, the dominant economic system (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Within the local Whaingaroa community, the term 'food sovereignty' is not widely in use. In fact, many times during my fieldwork I was asked what it means. Although some might take this as evidence that food sovereignty is not being enacted in the community, it must be taken into account that the term 'food sovereignty' was deliberately constructed as a concept to represent particular values and the interests of local food providers and communities who support and depend on them. At every opportunity, when I explained 'food sovereignty' and where it comes from, the idea seemed to resonate with research participants and other interested parties, many of whom are skilled in critical analysis and would not have hesitated to oppose the concept if it did not sit well with them. Furthermore, the kinds of community food initiatives active in Whaingaroa are mentioned in the literature as part of global trends that are connected with the wider Food sovereignty movement (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009).

Finding Food Sovereignty in Whaingaroa:

There are significant and consistent similarities between the values and perspectives offered by the global campaign for food sovereignty and the local food providers in Whaingaroa who were the focus of this fieldwork. Food sovereignty values include focussing on food for people, promoting the right to sufficient healthy and culturally appropriate food and rejecting the idea of food as 'just a commodity'. Local small-scale food providers are valued, including indigenous people. Food sovereignty rejects genetic modification and the privatisation of natural resources; it builds on the knowledge and skills of local providers; and it works with

nature, focussing on ecosystems to improve resilience in the face of climate change (Nyéléni 2007; Rose 2013; Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2011). These interconnected foci and values ascribed to the concept and campaign for food sovereignty seem to resonate with the community of local food providers in Whaingaroa that has been the focus of my fieldwork. The following section discusses some key foci and values of food sovereignty, as they are reflected by key informants.

The Right to Food

Unsurprisingly, the right to food is a value that resonates with the local food community of Whaingaroa, particularly food perceived to be healthy and sustainably produced. Liz, who runs a local permaculture farm with her partner, Rick,, reflects on this value:

... I believe people should have the right to quality healthy food. We shouldn't eat food with dangerous chemicals in it, and if the only way is to have our own food production systems, then so be it. But it's also crazy to drag food thousands of miles around using refrigeration to give it a long shelf life. We should be eating more seasonal local healthy food, enjoying the seasonality of local food. It's better for us, our bodies are designed to do that. We should 'pig out' on one thing, like avocados, and then move on to something else. It makes you more attuned to your environment, gives you that feeling that you are more a part of a biological system, whereas with supermarket purchasing you're not, you can just get whatever you want. There are no seasons.

Robz, a solo dad and active food forager, echoes this sentiment of rights which he perceives as conflicting with the dominant economic system. He describes his struggle with the global corporate system:

Everyone should have the right to be warm and dry and fed no matter what they do or don't do for a job, just basic rights which we don't really have. We're kind of borderline, we're pretty much doing it without money, but we're kind of always battling the system in a way. Even though it's so simple, it's so complicated to do as well because you're always battling the economy, I guess.

Wayne, a professional gardener who started the community garden at the local police station, extends this right beyond people, to all living things: 'I think it's not just a human right to eat. Any living entity has its right to eat.' He sees working towards food sovereignty as a gradual process in which places like Whaingaroa are leading the way. These examples demonstrate that the concept of the 'right to food' is reflected in the community of food producers in Whaingaroa.

Food needs to be Real: Decommodification and Reconnecting

Echoing the food sovereignty focus on decommodification of food, there is a strong emphasis on reconnecting with 'real food'. Jenny, who produces and sells sourdough bread, styles herself as an 'opportunivore' because she avoids processed food, but is not a fanatical

‘foodie’. She says she has always thought that ‘food needs to be *real*’, and the more removed we get from it, ‘the less real food becomes’. She describes this reconnection with food as part of a bigger movement, rejecting processed corporate food:

I think there’s a huge swell coming – lots more people have chooks now in the back of the garden and it’s okay now, whereas a while ago it wasn’t. In the 80s and 90s it wasn’t common, even in a rural area, to have a house-cow. I like it – when you go out and milk the cow – it feels more real. People have become too disconnected from food. When you grow your own potatoes, you know all the work that’s gone into it, and you get potatoes, and you feel so proud, and they taste so good. Not everyone can do that but you can do little things. You can grow parsley in a pot, or coriander. I think it’s coming back now. Even gardener magazines are more food-and-family-oriented.

Although this sentiment was echoed by most participants, it was called into question by Māori activist and local food provider, The Bro, who enjoys critiquing supposedly ethical food practices. While he personally values ‘real food’, he challenged other people’s conceptions of it: ‘How do people define real in terms of food? Is it real because it conforms to some notion they have in their head of how food traditionally was produced?’ This demonstrates that, while members of the community are interested in questioning conceptions around food values, the concept of food as ‘not just a commodity’ is reflected in the community. ‘Disconnection’ from food is perceived as undesirable and problematic, and ‘re-connecting’ is important.

Valuing Food Producers

Food sovereignty values local food producers. While it may be in the interests of local food producers to be valued, it is also evident that they value each other, and local food in general, to the point where competition is actively avoided. Jenny describes the lengths to which she went in order to avoid being in competition:

I didn’t want any competition with anyone. I didn’t want any conflict. So I looked at the bakeries, and they don’t do sourdough bread, and I had a talk to Bronwyn at the Herbal Dispensary and gave her a couple of samples, but she was quite happy to keep supplying the Hamilton bread, and because I was starting in such a small way, in small numbers that I wasn’t really a threat, all the bakeries were happy about it.

Food sovereignty also values and supports the contributions of indigenous people. This can be seen in the work of Te Waka Kai Ora and in that of their local Whaingaroa member, Kaiwaka, who is both a valued member of the community and also supports the work of other local food producers. The values he describes are also reflected by Te Waka Kai Ora, as he describes:

This is what we’re made of, eh? The *whakapapa* [ancestry] of your *kai*, the *wairua* [spirit] of the soil and the *whenua* [ground], the *mana* [integrity] and the *matauranga*

[understanding] of the people, and *te āo turoa*, the natural sciences in the garden, how things grow, how they perpetuate, and the *mauri* [vital essence] is the essence of life... and by practising all this you give rise to pure projects. To join Te Waka Kai Ora you have to know your *whakapapa*, know where you stand in your tribe and you have to get up and speak for your tribe. We believe that when we are born we are born with two umbilical cords – one is cut from mum, but the other umbilical cord goes straight to the *atua* [God(s)], and you don't have to cut it, or know that it's there— but all you have to do is touch it, and the touch comes into you, and that touch is when we are playing with the soil—that's when we're connecting with the Atua and we're putting something lovely back in there, so he doesn't want it to die, he wants the world to flourish with all that.

Similar indigenous values were shared by The Bro, describing his own personal ethics around food. He expressed how values sometimes contradicted each other in practice:

It's an interesting thing, eh. I've a whole list of values, but some of them can be conflicting. For example, the value of hosting, but also being hosted, and being a good guest. I've struggled with this in the past, especially when I had more rules, like I don't eat meat, or inorganic, or whatever. You start spending time on the *marae* [traditional meeting place], and there's this value of *manaakitanga* [care and respect]. And it conflicts with my ideas about how I would feed people and what. So these values come up against each other, and you have to make judgments and trade-offs all the time. So now I eat whatever's put in front of me because it's an expression of *manaakitanga*, not necessarily what I would eat at home, but it's macaroni cheese with sow-crate pork, but as a good guest I'd observe *manaakitanga*. *kaitiakitanga* [guardianship]. Probably *whakapapa* is the most important concept or value behind my approach to food. These days *whakapapa* has been dumbed down to this simple notion of it's who your parents and great grandparents are... but I reckon actually *whakapapa* is actually a more fuller concept about the journey of all things through time and space. All things have *whakapapa*. A rock has *whakapapa*, snow has *whakapapa*, stars...

These indigenous values were not only reflected by the Māori participants, but also to varying degrees by Pākehā participants, many of whom shared a reverence for indigenous ways of doing things, as Liz reflects:

Māori systems are amazing because they distil values and principles into proverbs and a lot of them are environmental, they're metaphors, like about a bird in a forest, but they're actually about people.

Local food and local food providers are valued in this community, as are indigenous understandings and knowledge. These reflect similar foci in global food sovereignty.

Resilience, Accountability and Integrity

Community resilience, producer accountability and the ability to investigate integrity are seen as positive aspects of local food. Justin, who runs a café specialising in local, seasonal and organic food, points out that the movement towards free-range and sustainable and local farming practices comes from older food traditions, ‘but then it’s newly really popular among people who can afford it ‘cause it is a thing of being able, especially somewhere like New Zealand, where we don’t have those established old communities [practices]’. He feels more comfortable about the integrity of local food that he has the opportunity to experience for himself:

At least if it's a New Zealand company I can ask some questions, and say “can you tell me about this product because I'm interested?” Like my free-range egg lady, I said “Oh, can I come and have a look at your farm?” and she goes, “yeah” and it's just beautiful, and that’s really cool to see: how the chickens actually roam around, and it's just like her photo on the website said. It's just big paddocks with chickens in them, and that's choice.

Localisation of food is a major shared goal as a remedy to the social disconnection created by the corporate food system. Robz, who is aiming to live money-free, describes his perspective on local food systems:

... what I’m working towards is very localised, for me localisation is the solution to most things. It would be great if every community took it upon themselves to think “what do we need to live here... to eat?”. By planting fruit trees we can see to the town’s fruit needs... growing some grains, and we’ve got a harbour so keep the harbour and oceans healthy and we’re pretty sweet really - that’s a nutritious diet of local, and being local everyone’s got a responsibility and is affected by it. So, food becomes an important part of people’s lives.

This extract also shows the interconnected concern for the environment in caring for the harbour. This is also central to the concept of food sovereignty.

Among the community of local food providers, there is critical awareness around ‘organic’ branding. This critique focuses on the fact that because organic food is often imported, produced by large corporations and heavily processed, the organic brand is called into question. Locally produced food is seen as potentially more ethical, and local producers are seen as more trustworthy, as The Bro describes:

... call something organic, you can charge premium for it and people come running, and no one trusts conventional food. I don’t trust organic food either myself, I only trust food where I’ve looked the grower in the eye... half the reason why I wanted to start drinking milk again is so that I could talk to dairy farmers, so I could go to the farm gate, buy milk and you get to talk to people. I don't think buying organic dairy milk via Fonterra [a large milk corporation] is any different from buying [conventional milk].... I mean there's a slight gain there because at least you’re

buying milk that hasn't seen a lot of pesticides involved in its production, but still, you're still supporting a big corporate monster whose aim is to extract as much milk from the land as possible using whatever means necessary.

Jon, who runs a small food co-operative specialising in organic food, shares a critique of organic branding and also is critical of the large amount of fossil fuels burned through food transportation. He sees local food as a solution to this issue as well:

... organic food isn't the answer either. I think the only solution is small, localised everything. I can't see that any other way is sustainable in the populations of however many billion people we've got on the planet now. I think we need to do everything on the local scale as much as possible, and only the bare essentials should be sent anything more than, say, 80km.

This focus on localising food systems with their greater potential for connection and accountability to the community was considered of major importance by all the local food producers who participated in this research.

Resisting the Corporate

Within the Whaingaroa community there is a strong focus on resisting corporate exploitation. This can be seen in active protests against potential seabed mining over the last decade. It is also reflected in the perspectives of the key informants of this research. This corporate resistance is particularly strong over the topic of Genetic Modification (GM). Mike, a local organic dairy farmer, describes his feelings toward GM:

I loathe it with a passion, and it's not because I'm anti-progress or –science. It's just the motivations behind GM is not about feeding the world or high yields or anything else. It's about control of the food chain, and it is a topic I've researched quite thoroughly, and the more I learn about GM, the more scary I find it. It's scary, and we shouldn't be putting it into our food chain.

This distrust of GM and corporations is a common perspective throughout the community and resonates with criticism rejecting corporate control and GM, which has been a particular focus of food sovereignty activism in Europe (Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2011). Like Mike, Wayne is critical of the argument that GM is really focussed on 'feeding the world':

[GM] is definitely something I'm not in favour of. There's no real benefit. I mean, there's obviously some benefit for production and shelf-life, but the potential hazards outweighs the benefit. There is plenty of food; so much of it goes to waste. There's more than enough food for everyone on this planet. There's so much abundance, but we have people living in such luxurious lifestyles, and outside the front gate there's a beggar on the street who's got nothing.

Similar perspectives were offered by many members of the community. There is a common insistence that food is not scarce, but that social inequalities and distribution problems are

responsible for hunger. Emphasis is placed on making food more accessible with community gardens and public fruit trees as an alternative solution to corporate control. Corporations are seen as exploitative and unsustainable, as Jon reflects:

Being “for profit only”, it’s for short-term profit only because it’s destroying the topsoil and depleting the water levels, so it’s actually not even for long-term profit, and the costs are passed on to the local people or the tax payers or whoever.

These examples of corporate resistance are similar to those reflected in the Declaration of Nyéléni (2007), as in the focus on environmental sustainability and the need to protect the land from corporate exploitation.

Conclusion

While ‘food sovereignty’, as a term, is not in prevalent use in Whaingaroa, many of the practices associated with it are being enacted in this area and wider New Zealand. These include community gardening, land sharing, “WWOOFing” and sustainable farming practices. Furthermore, alongside these practices, the community of food producers in Whaingaroa resonates with and reflects the values associated with food sovereignty, particularly in the importance placed on local food systems, indigenous knowledge and caring for the environment. As with the wider food sovereignty movement, a strong emphasis is placed on the right to food, on the decommodification of food and on supporting local food producers. Local food is seen as more resilient and sustainable as well as encouraging of accountability and integrity based on personal and community connections. In line with the concept of food sovereignty, similar rejection of corporate food production and genetic modification are also reflected in the community. Although these foci, values and practices do not come directly from the global food sovereignty campaign, they can be said to be interconnected, and are motivated by similar concerns about corporate exploitation. Furthermore, these reflected food sovereignty values support Rose’s (2013) depiction of food sovereignty as an inclusive movement that genuinely represents the various perspectives of a wide variety of food producers, globally, supporting the argument of food sovereignty as a genuine grass-roots movement that springs forth from the experiences, needs and values of a community closely connected to food and land.

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