

Abstract

He Wairua tō te Kai: Nutrition, Food Security, and Well-Being in Children in Regional New Zealand †

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Abstract: Our current food system is failing to deliver on health and well-being, equity, and food security and Hawke's Bay has one of the fastest-growing rates of childhood obesity. 'He wairua tō te kai' suggests that there is more to food than nutrition and advances a cultural connectedness approach to food and nourishment of tamariki (children) and rangatahi (youth). A stakeholder and community enquiry directed this initiative to focus on children's Hauora in a holistic fashion in order to build food security; include mātauranga Māori throughout the project; work with existing initiatives, community, and whānau; start its implementation in schools. Quantitative baseline monitoring was carried out in 43 primary and secondary schools with 2300 students (Age 9 or 13) with surveys covering food security, well-being (WHO5), food behaviours (sources of lunch, breakfast, etc.), and we measured age-standardised BMI for each student. Our food security results indicate that, while approximately one in five children live in households that regularly run out of food, up to two-thirds of students in a school may be affected, and this is not restricted to students in low-decile schools (where most nutritional programmes focus). Overall, only half of the student population in Hawke's Bay was a healthy weight. This study is the first of its kind to present a detailed picture of Hauora for a comprehensive community-wide sample across 43 schools including schools participating in the Ka Ora, Ka Ako School Lunch programme. These data form the baseline of a before–after evaluation of the programme's impact on multiple aspects of food environments and nutritional well-being.

Keywords: Hauora; childhood well-being; nutrition; food security; obesity



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