



**'GETTING DIRTY WITH
PAPATŪĀNUKU'
MANAIA CUNNINGHAM AND
KOUKOURĀRATA GARDENS**

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY

COVER IMAGE: Māra kai at Koukourārata.

ALL IMAGES THROUGHOUT DOCUMENT: Maui Studios, 2017



Flourishing māra. Koukourārata 2017.

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

How can the creation and maintenance of marae-based market gardens contribute to wider community aims such as employment, education, business opportunities and papakāinga? These are the four pou of Koukourārata, a community near Port Levy on Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū (the Banks Peninsula) who grow food on lands that have a long history of cultivation. Manaia Cunningham (Ngāti Irakehu, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Mutunga) leads this project and talked to us about the power of food growing as an expression of mana and identity. Below, we capture aspects of our kōrero with Manaia as he shares insights into how marae-based food growing practices underpin an alternate community economy.



Mahi tahi: whānau at work in the māra. Koukourārata 2017

HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA VALUES



Manaia Cunningham

"[We are a] Māori village, growing a Māori product. The water that's used to water the garden is pure. The soil that grows [the food] is pure. Our whenua, Papatūānuku, is where we work with her, not against her. We make sure that the food that goes into children's puku is safe and that's being honest, I'm not using flowery, fluffy language. That's fact." (Manaia Cunningham, 2018)

The gardens at Koukourārata have been built on a site traditionally set aside for growing food in the days of the flax trade (circa. 1830) when trading pigs and potatoes with sealers and whalers was the norm. Today, the marae has a viable mussel

farm enterprise. They also secured a MBIE grant to develop a market garden and create new markets for their taonga potato species such as wharenuī, whataroa, waiporoporo and moemoe. Manaia says that one of the reasons they went into the market garden project was because they were sick of feeding people supermarket food. The crops grown on this land are 100% spray-free compared to the supermarket-bought varieties which can be covered with up to 18 synthetic chemicals. Organic Māori potatoes have small yields, but for Manaia, food production is about quality, not quantity, and with the price of organic potatoes coming in at around \$6.50 for a kilo, there is value in growing

for a niche market. Being spray-free means that organic farming is labour intensive, and weed control a major task. Linking with the Department of Corrections to provide work in the māra not only helps with food production and maintenance, but also uses gardening as a form of community service providing opportunity for people to connect to the land, and to training opportunities. The rūnaka has been responsible for instituting certificates of accomplishment to recognise the work carried out by PD workers. As Manaia notes:

We gave our Correction brothers and sisters tractor driving courses, chainsaw courses, fencing courses and quad bikes. So, we've had thirty Correction brothers and sisters get certificates in those activities. They had to do the hours and the training and we had tutors that ran the programme. Those tutors didn't want to be around them in the beginning. At the end, the tutors were high fiving these guys.

There are also education and employment opportunities for whānau who help out in the māra and at the market stalls where Koukourārata product is sold. The proceeds from sales goes towards health and education outcomes, including buying school uniforms for the kids and purchasing seed stock.

MANAAKI VALUES AND RANGATIRATANGA

Our natural assets are what should be feeding our visitors because that's our mana. (Manaia Cunningham, 2018)

Manaia has described his work as restoring kai sovereignty. The ability to provide kai that is grown onsite and free of pesticides poses a strong contrast

to the store-bought, mass-produced meat, fruit and vegetable often seen and consumed at hui. In this approach, food becomes an agent of change, a vehicle for the uplift of mana and an expression of rangatiratanga for Koukourārata. Selling this food at markets also provides the opportunity for the marae to connect with wider communities and Manaia describes the customers of Koukourārata product as being part of the story now:

I want our return customers to come to our harvest days and I want our return customers to come to our planting days because they're part of our story now. Planting days, harvesting days and festivals. Get the music going, have a karakia, have a kaumātua there, make sure we've got enough food for everyone.

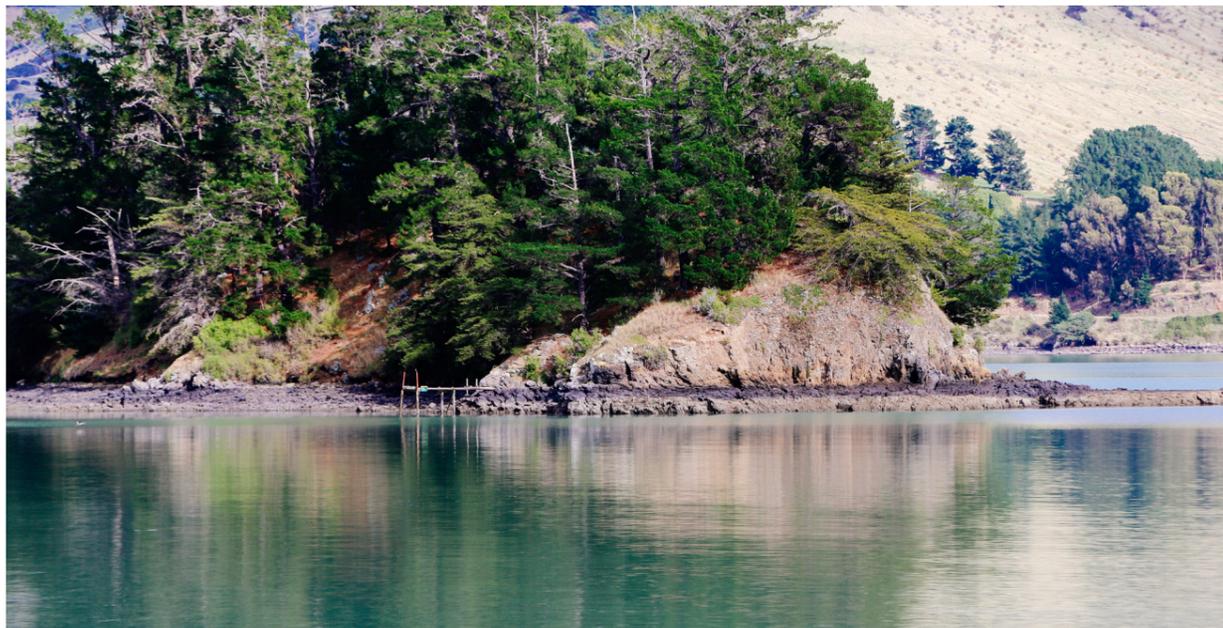
The māra is also part of a larger vision for some of the more than 5,000 registered marae members to return home to live and work. Building a viable papakāinga that has mussel farming and māra kai at its heart, is one of the dreams underpinning Manaia's efforts at Koukourārata. With canny planning, a land and water-base, and the skills to live off the land, Manaia believes in living a different lifestyle, free from the demands of a high paying job.

Getting dirty with Papatūānuku in our own village. [...] This is what gardening does to you. You don't realise, if you grow food, you don't need a \$100,000 salary. If you've got your own home on your own land, potentially you can have a really good lifestyle. If you've got thirty or forty grand a year, you can do it. [...] My plan is to be home by early 2019. And to learn to adjust to having a lower income but knowing that I've got skills to live off the land and create money is exciting. And I might have a mortgage but it won't be huge.

Getting your hands in the soil to plant the kai, gathering with others to harvest the kai, and selling this kai to whānau and community members who want a connection to the marae, are all quiet revolutionary steps towards an alternate way of living and being, based on the indivisible relationship between lands, waters and peoples.

As Manaia reminds us:

When you get our kai or eat our product, that kai comes from the ground that goes into your mouth. It goes inside you therefore you're part of the whenua.



Top left: Taewa, traditional Māori potato varieties; harvest day; Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū



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

WHATUNGARONGARO TE TANGATA TOITŪ TE WHENUA AS PEOPLE DISAPPEAR FROM SIGHT, THE LAND REMAINS

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OUR LAND
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,
Toiora te Wai

National
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