



ENSURING EQUITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN AN EAST CAPE MĀNUKA HONEY BUSINESS

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY

Eugene & Laney Hunia, with their children. Tea (19) studies food science and nutrition at Otago University, Jett (18) is the queen bee rearer and bee keeper (also currently getting her commercial skippers licence) and Sol Hunia (6) the face of the brand and soon to be joined by his little brother Sam.



**"THE DAYS OF GIVING A MĀORI
LANDOWNER A POT OF HONEY FOR
PUTTING YOUR HIVES ON ARE WELL AND
TRULY OVER". (LANEY HUNIA, 2018)**

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

East Coast honey business Whenua Honey incorporates a love for whānau, community and the environment, with a desire to create a successful mānuka honey business. Born out of a desire to ensure that Māori landowners benefit from the honey products being produced on their whenua, and a commitment to giving back to community, the Hunia whānau help foster relationships between Māori landowners and beekeepers so that the benefits flow in all directions. Elaine (Laney), her husband Eugene (Gene) and children Tea, Jett and Sol live in Opotiki and whakapapa to the East Coast (Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Ngāi Tai, Te Whakatōhea, Ngāi Tūhoe) and Northland (Ngā Puhī). In what follows, Laney shares her whānau journey navigating the New Zealand honey industry, creating their business as a lifestyle for her whānau and embracing their kaitiaki responsibilities by ensuring sustainable business practices. Whānau is at the heart of this business and Whenua Honey labelling features their youngest child, So while their first ever honey harvest for the market was aided by daughter Jett and her school friends in exchange for a summer on the coast. Maintaining good relationships with landowners and beekeepers, so that all may benefit from this enterprise, is also an integral aspect of Whenua Honey's practices.



HE KAWA WHANAUNGATANGA VALUES



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My husband saw an opportunity to connect the two and to be of mutual benefit, so that the Māori land owners, on one hand, can learn from existing beekeepers in terms of mentoring and resources (so reciprocity) and on the other hand, existing beekeepers get access to whānau land blocks. (Laney Hunia, 2018)

While working as beekeepers, the Hunia whānau noticed how access to blocks of mānuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) was a precious thing. They saw an opportunity to work with other Māori landowners to gain benefits from the honey industry, and they were also in a position to grow capability for beekeepers by acting as conduits to access Māori lands. Laney and Gene take seriously

the responsibility to maintain clear and transparent relationships with all parties. As Laney says, “the industry’s renowned for a lack of transparency or a lack of equity in terms of what profits get shared back to landowners and even beekeepers”. According to Laney:

So, we saw those issues and we thought well we could change that, we can offer a different model that - ok - everybody at the top can get a little bit less - but we shift those benefits back down to the whānau, the land owners, the beekeepers and also the knowledge, share the knowledge.

Knowledge-sharing is important within an industry

where the risk of diseases such as American Foulbrood and Varroa mite are persistent. This is why bee hives need to be registered as negligence can cause widespread disease. Overstocking hives and subsequent diseases are a regular occurrence in the honey industry, and so the Hunia whānau insists on a duty of care for their hives, and that there is equity in the placement of hives on land so that the majority can benefit.

The health of the bees, taking in disease-free, healthy hives into an area. That you are not overstocking the whenua [...] One hive will rob another hive of honey. It's ensuring that you have that relationship with those landowners and that you work as a collective so that we are all getting some honey and you're all getting some gains.

KAITIAKITANGA VALUES

Laney and her husband include their children in the activities of the business. Help with harvesting will be off-set by taking the kids fishing, hunting and diving. All members of the Hunia whānau are involved in the growth and decision making of the Whenua Honey business. Acting ethically is an important aspect of their practices and can be understood as a form of kaitiakitanga not only in terms of care for the land, but also care for the wellbeing and leadership potential of their children.

We really involve the kids in all conversations and we'll take them to hui with key people in the industry. How are children to learn if they don't get involved in the process? We have discussions around ethical and unethical business practices. We, as a whānau, have been burnt in our earlier dealings and they were certainly part of that, and the learnings gained from that. They are included in the whole process, to allow them to inspire themselves and to take up opportunities.

Their love for the outdoors and for the bees they nurture allow the Hunia whānau to actively create unique connections and relationships to the environment they work in.

The kids are very much outdoors, growing up on the coast. [...] The kids are river babies, water babies, they love fishing and diving, and the bush for hunting. The bees take us, as a whānau, into the most beautiful parts of the coast.

CONCLUSION

If Māori have historically been minor players in the New Zealand honey sector, businesses such as Whenua Honey demonstrate the opportunities that exist for Māori landowners to now participate in, and actively shape, this growing food and medicine market. Whenua Honey are currently working with initiatives such as New Zealand Trade and Enterprises, Poutama Trust, Te Puni Kōkiri and the Callaghan Innovation Institute to stay relevant, develop niche markets and sharpen their competitive edge. Working as a collective and ensuring the support of others in the industry, are key to a business that holds kaupapa Māori at its heart. Laney reminds us:

Surround yourself with people that you trust and that you feel have the same āhua (nature), the same values and vision. Look at the opportunities, don't be afraid to ask for help to collaborate. You're not going to trust everybody, unfortunately, but there are some really cool, like-minded people out there. Apply for funding, ask the questions and get the help.

If you would like to learn more about **Whenua Honey** and purchase their Mānuka Blend of Honey products, you can check out their website here: <https://whenuahoney.co.nz/>



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

TE TOTO O TE TANGATA, HE KAI TE ORANGA O TE TANGATA, HE WHENUA WHILE FOOD PROVIDES THE BLOOD IN OUR VEINS, OUR HEALTH IS DRAWN FROM THE LAND

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OUR LAND
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,
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