

Aotearoa Food Action Alliance

A primer: if you wish to join, participate, shape...

“The time has come to listen to ordinary people. They are constructing a new world...”

– *Gustvo Esteva*

1. Problems with food

There can be no question: our food system needs to change. From the supermarket duopoly's influence on the price of food to cancer-causing nitrates in freshwater and the ongoing disruptions of climate change, there are countless examples emphasising the need to transform the ways we get our food.

In our understanding (informed by many!) these aren't problems with neatly packaged solutions we can 'drag and drop' and then be 'done', but are better thought of as *predicaments*, complex and entangled relationships we can't 'solve' in any tidy way but instead must participate within, building power and working together to transform the relationships at a systems level.

2. The need for an alliance

While many diverse groups are doing amazing work to address food issues in their local communities, the political dimension of food (who eats, who doesn't; who decides and who is left out...) remains under-discussed in New Zealand and there is no unified network drawing attention to the broader change afoot or sharing resources to build collective power.

As the Brazilian trade unionist Chico Mendes famously said, “environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening.” (Of course, we love gardening too!).

3. What the alliance could be

In attempting to convene an Aotearoa Food Action Alliance (a working title...) our hope is that we might provide a point of unity amidst the divisions of our age, increasing the visibility of existing efforts and helping to facilitate collaborations, sharing and support – extending the many different ways we are working to change how people get food. In short, action; creating opportunities to increase our collective power to feed people in dignity-enhancing ways (in mana-enhancing ways).

4. What the alliance won't be

The alliance won't have a centralised leadership, corporate structure or corporate funding. There won't be any membership fees or mandatory meetings. No person or group can compel another to

act “or else”. Instead, agency (and power) emerges from participation and the ability to speak to others.

5. Values, hopes, visions

As we see it, the alliance exists to facilitate: helping, sharing, feasting, solidarity, reciprocity, generosity, conviviality, diversity, exchange. It acknowledges and emerges from a commitment to changing the world as it is into a world where no one goes hungry, where human and ecological diversity is celebrated and supported, where people are empowered to live lives of agency, dignity, and accountability at multiple and overlapping scales, e.g. individual, family, whānau, workplace, sports clubs, church groups, marae, hapū, iwi, households, streets, suburbs, cities, bioregions etc.

6. Possible actions for alliance members to participate in together

Social support: sharing stories, experience, failures, advice. Can be online or in-person depending on context. A few local members or nationwide. One-offs or more seasonal etc.

Knowledge commons: sharing teaching materials, successful organisational models, tool design, crop plans, accountability processes, funding strategies etc.

Public engagement: film nights, seasonal festivals, public meals, poster campaigns, community compost building, public harvest days, garden tours etc (coordinated around the country?).

Material commons: sharing (gifting, swapping, selling?) compost, seeds, cuttings, seedlings etc; reciprocal labour exchanges (as formal or informal as you like); lending your trailer for a weekend through to collective ownership of tools, processing equipment, land(?)

7. How it works

We have a shared online space where people whose work aligns with our values (and who are interested in participating) can meet and suggest things that they might like to work on with other people. People who want to help, do. Those who don't (in this context), don't. No one can force anyone to do anything. Invitation to the space proceeds by shoulder-tapping along existing networks.

If we want to speak “as an alliance” (as public commentary is one possible function should an appropriate situation arise), we propose a consensus model, where everyone has to either agree or be neutral to what will be said publicly. The goal (consistent with our politics) is that everyone is on board / no one is left behind. All involved have a say. This focus on unity and collectivity is important should a situation arise where we see value in speaking with a singular voice. But for all other occasions, the alliance is a place of many voices and our aspiration of each uplifting and empowering others as and when we are interested/available.

In summary, the alliance is about grassroots action organised through a peer-to-peer network based on a politics of consent. Respect gets respect. Power comes from participation. And as Wendell Berry notes, eating “is inescapably an agricultural act”. We are all involved. Our power lies in this connection and the various ways we might draw attention to it, working together for greater change.