

THE NGĀI TAHU-NESS OF KAI

A REPORT FOR NGĀI TAHU FARMING



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Introduction

The Cultural Attributes Programme (CAP) wants to examine how agricultural businesses can get higher returns by ensuring their global consumers understand the distinctive cultural attributes of food products made in New Zealand. This requires understanding what is meant by both ‘cultural attributes’ and ‘food’.

Food is not the same as sustenance, humans ‘eat’ rather than ‘feed’. Rather than just consuming the essential nutrients needed to sustain life, humans make a wide range of choices far beyond those needed for ‘fuelling the machine’. Most choices regarding ‘food’ are determined by culture rather than sustenance. *Food is cultural.*

Cultural attributes are not just the most obvious associations, like Māori and hangi, Italy and pizza, or Japan and sushi. A culture’s beliefs, values and behaviours about food are a subset of their wider culture. Food is also one of the best ways of understanding an entire culture. There are cultural beliefs, values and behaviours (BVBs) about how to produce, prepare and consume food. These BVBs are often key cultural components – tapu in Māori culture is a powerful example.

The cultural attributes of food can be understood as a culture’s general beliefs, values and behaviours (BVBs) and its specific BVBs about how they go about producing, preparing and consuming food.

To be clear: the project does not focus on ‘traditional’ Māori culture or BVBs. Use of modern production and processing and preparation techniques and technologies does not mean the food is not ‘Ngāi Tahu’ or ‘Māori.’

Similarly, while the project is focused on Ngāi Tahu cultural attributes, these can and should be used in conjunction with wider New Zealand attributes, particularly the ‘clean and green’ image that is well known internationally.

CAP needs to examine both Ngāi Tahu/Māori BVBs *and* the target national/ethnic/religious cultures from around the world to find similarities. There are also **food subcultures** like vegetarianism and paleo that are not defined by national/ethnic/religious boundaries. There are three key areas of focus:

- Ngāi Tahu BVBs
- National/ethnic/religious BVBs
- Food subculture BVBs

The Ngāi Tahu-ness of kai

Kai is central to Ngāi Tahu culture. Kai is connection to place and to people, it is imbued with a spirituality and sacredness, it is ordered and understood by a set of intricate rules and guidelines about how to harvest, hunt or produce it, how to prepare it, how to consume it and, critically, how to share it with others. For Ngāi Tahu, food – the animals and plants that are hunted and harvested and the ecosystems in which they are gathered – is intricately connected with Ngāi Tahu culture, wellbeing, politics and general life. There are eight key Ngāi Tahu beliefs, values and behaviours about how food should be produced, prepared and consumed:

1. **Animism:** the belief that relationships and interactions between people and with nature are of central importance, animism is the basis for all BVBs relating to food.
2. **Whakapapa:** the belief that all of nature is related, central to understanding relationships with people and nature, all food has whakapapa as do the ecosystems in which the food lives. Whakapapa also connects with Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) and seeing animals/plants/land as family.
3. **Mauri:** belief that all beings in the cosmic have this life essence, all food has mauri though the level of mauri depends on a range of factors including . Giving food is a gift of mauri.
4. **Tapu:** the belief in the sacredness of cosmic power and the prestige that comes from this, tapu provides a critical framework for kai, controlling every phase of behaviour from preparation, gathering, eating to sharing.
5. **Mana:** the belief that personal power comes from place, whakapapa and personal behaviour, mana regulates food exchange/sharing and guides relationships with the environment.
6. **Kaitiakitanga:** the value to care for nature as kin, kaitiakianga is a fundamental guide in the harvesting, hunting and production of kai.
7. **Manaakitanga:** the belief in nurturing relationships, looking after people, and being very careful about how others are treated, manaakitanga is often expressed through kai.
8. **Mahinga kai:** the behaviours of hunting, gathering, or producing your own food and the importance of the places the food is gathered.

National, ethnic & religious cultures

Generally speaking, most indigenous cultures across the Americas, Oceania, Africa and South East Asia have very similar BVBs. Also, religious cultures can be found across countries but the country of origin is given to provide an easier target for producers.

Animism: Japanese (Shinto) and **Chinese** (Dao) beliefs are similar to animism, as are some still strongly held folk/pagan beliefs in **Korea**. There are some similarities between **India** (Hindu) and animism as well. Also, **New Age** spiritual beliefs share much in common with animism and many **Westerners** have a natural affinity for animist beliefs – particularly in terms of yearning for relationships between producer and consumer that have been cut by the global agro-industrial food industry.

How to use this: While animism is really the underlying framework for the rest of the BVBs, the key takeaway is the importance of relationships. Building genuine connections between producer and consumer should be a key focus of Ngāi Tahu producers.

Whakapapa: Indian (Hindu) and **Chinese** (Confucian) beliefs about humanity's kinship with nature are similar. Also, the idea of Earth Mother/Mother Nature is strong in **Western** cultures, also scientific concepts like DNA/Tree of Life and Gaia Theory are similar.

How to use this: Ngāi Tahu producers can use kinship with whenua/moana, plants/animals to emphasize environmental and ethical credentials. The Mother Earth message will have more resonance with Western consumers.

Mauri: China (Daoist: qi/chì), **Japan** (folk/pagan: ki), **India** (Hindu: prana) have beliefs similar to mauri. Depending on the survey between 40-80% of **Westerners** also believe in a pervasive 'life force' as well, with the concept have particular resonance for **New Age** believers.

How to use this: The concept of mauri can be used as a symbol of connection between producer and consumer – the 'gift of mauri'. Care needs to be taken as in different cultures certain food types have different 'life force' qualities, for example prana has a complex food framework that the producer would need to understand before using the concept of mauri/prana for certain products. For Western/New Age, simply using the term 'life force' would have the best impact.

Tapu: India (Hindu: shakti) belief is close to tapu, as is **North Africa** (folk: baraka) beliefs. Also, translated as taboo this is a concept, if changed in translation, found in the **West**.

How to use this: The Western conception of taboo does not translate well to food, however, the Hindu shakti is related to prana and fits into the Hindu food framework.

Mana: China (Taoist: te/de) is very similar to mana, also the term mana has become widespread across the world, used not only in **English** but found in **Japan** and other non-Western countries.

How to use this: Mana can be used to with translation directly to Chinese consumers. With some definition it can also be used to appeal to other cultures. It is probably best used in conjunction with other BVBs like mauri, kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga.

Kaitiakitanga: This concept probably has the widest resonance, both with traditional **Indian** (Hindu) and **Chinese** (Taoism) beliefs but also the modern **Western** beliefs. Three-quarters of surveyed respondents across 27 countries agreed with a definition of human-nature relations that aligns with kaitiakitanga.

How to use this: Because sustainability is so current and popular, Ngāi Tahu producers need to be careful using kaitiakitanga without supporting it with wider cultural values. It could also be amplified by connecting it to New Zealand's 'clean and green' international image.

Manaakitanga: Values similar to manaakitanga are found in **Arabic** (Muslim) culture, **Indian** (Hindu and Muslim) culture and **Chinese** culture. While they are not as strong or broad in scope in the **West**, they are still important within a smaller sphere of family and friends though they still remain stronger in Mediterranean areas like **Italy** and **Greece**.

How to use this: Ngāi Tahu producers can use this in two key ways. The first is to emphasise how their food can be shared by the consumer, with the other associated BVBs giving extra weight to why this food should be shared. Second, the producer can explain to the consumer why sharing their food product is so important to them.

Mahinga kai: Hunting and fishing remain incredibly popular in many **Western** countries. Hunting is particularly popular in the **US, Canada, UK, Ireland, Greece** and **Scandinavia** while fishing is very popular in **US, Canada, UK, Finland, the Netherlands, Australia, Sweden** and **Lithuania**. Both hobbies are often driven by a desire to connect with nature and because of the sense of independence and ability to self-sustain. Many developing countries like **China** and **India** are also seeing large increases in recreational hunting and fishing from wealthier classes.

How to use this: Ngāi Tahu producers can represent themselves as coming from a long line of hunter and fishers with a strong tradition for being on the land and sea, also emphasising the connection to nature and sense of independence mahinga kai provides.

Food subcultures

Organics: Organics is one of the oldest food subcultures, and depending on country is anywhere between 1% and 5% of the population, with consumers coming from the wealthier brackets. Purchasers are often motivated by: personal health, sustainability, alternative medicine, spirituality and emotional empathy.

How to use this: The motivations for buying organic have a strong alignment with Ngāi Tahu BVBs and organic Ngāi Tahu producers can use these to appeal to organic consumers.

Flexitarianism: The movement towards reducing meat intake is largely driven by environmental and personal health concerns and is growing, with between 20-30% of populations in Western countries self-identifying as flexitarian.

How to use this: Many flexitarians will look for higher quality, often organic and/or grass-fed ethically and environmentally raised, meat when they do eat meat, so Ngāi Tahu producers could target them through the use of the many cultural attributes as well as the grass-fed nature of their products.

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs): These networks are a reaction to the global industrial food industry, they often emphasise qualities like: craft/artisanal production, traditional production, regional palates, organic/sustainable farming, high quality products, and embedded food production.

How to use this: There are many similarities between Ngāi Tahu BVBs and AFNs. While there are some issues, like many AFNs focusing on local produce, the other alignments are powerful and if correctly marketed the distance may not be an issue.

Provenance and authenticity: Increasing numbers of consumers want to know where their food comes from, who produced it and how it was produced. They want authentic provenance and will often pay a higher price for these products.

How to use this: Authentic provenance, through whakapapa, mauri and mana in particular, is important to Ngāi Tahu producers and this can be communicated to consumers both as a way of expressing the provenance and reassuring consumers of its authenticity.

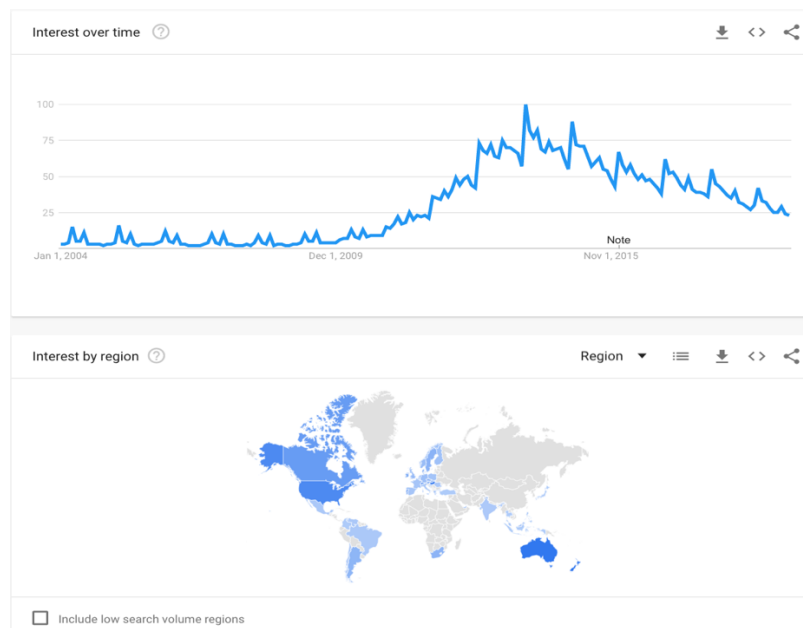
Low-carbohydrate diets: Low-carbohydrate diets, like Atkins and keto, are relatively popular as a means of weight loss, with several percent of populations in Western countries using these. Often these diets involve large amounts of meat and dairy.

How to use this: Ngāi Tahu produces meat and dairy and while the low-carb diets are not usually driven by anything other than weight loss, the cultural attributes might help differentiate Ngāi Tahu products.

Paleo diet: The Paleo diet or ancestral health movement is aimed at eating pre-modern diets, with an emphasis on whole foods, organics, grass-fed meat and other ‘Palaeolithic’ foods. Amongst other indigenous people, Māori are used as an example of the benefits of the paleo diet. Paleo diets are growing in popularity and the consumers are wealthier than average.

How to use this: Ngāi Tahu producers can emphasise their recent Palaeolithic diet and merge this with the grass-fed nature of their meat products as a way of targeting Paleo consumers.

Interest in these subcultures can be charted using Google Trends, e.g. searches for ‘Paleo diet’ below:



Output examples

As well as a large report that details Ngāi Tahu BVBs over time, matching national, ethnic and religious cultures and food subcultures, the project will also provide more specific country reports similar to those below:

