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### **Far North schools feeding their communities one garden at a time**

Three Far North schools are overcoming the challenges of rural isolation and hunger head-on with the launch of the Kai Rongoa initiative.

Ngataki School, Te Kura o Kao and Te Hapua School welcomed in their communities yesterday to bless and launch the initiative which is making headway in targeting poverty and deprivation for children and their families through the provision of healthy, nutritious kai.

The initiative – in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, Te Puni Kokiri, Far North District Council, Fonterra, Ngati Kuri Trust Board, Te Runanganui o Te Aupouri and Whakawhiti Ora Pai project managed by Melanie Dalziel – has seen all schools install kai and rongoa gardens that are being managed to improve access to fresh fruit and vegetables .

Food access was identified in the Make It Happen Te Hiku 2014 community survey as a significant priority for families, says Ministry of Social Development strategic lead adviser Sheridan Waitai.

She adds the initiative's key objectives are multi-pronged – to ensure children have access to nutritious kai, to ensure children are free from living in fear of poverty, to build community resilience, capability and sustainability of food in schools and to link learning to the school curriculum and improve educational outcomes for children.

At the Ngataki School launch, Ngati Kuri Trust Board chairperson Harry Burkhardt said the initiative was a significantly opportune investment in the community.

“What we’re doing here is creating high trust eco-environments that build community resilience and create sustainable opportunities. The garden serves as a metaphor for growing our tamariki – they flourish in unison,” he said.

Ngatiki School has planted raised beds featuring plants from beetroot to lettuce, from kawakawa to lavender. Further down the track, the school is looking to expand to include garlic, native plants and fruit-bearing trees, such as feijoa and tamarillo.

In addressing the community, Far North District Mayor John Carter said the Kai Rongoa initiative was a timely reminder of what information sharing and building a communal knowledge base can achieve.



“The reason why I have a garden now is because I used to have one with my Dad when I was this skinny, young fella. I used to work the rotary hoe – and not much has changed!” he joked.

The project has been developed to achieve several long and short-term outcomes that are designed to create healthy environments that lead to healthy choices.

“The skills learnt in developing gardens and native forests are linked to iwi aspirations of developing the whenua and eventually scaling what is best to grow for economic outcomes,” said Sheridan.