

Torere Perennial Food Forest 25 May 2009

At the end of May, physical activity and nutrition experts from all over the country, as well as overseas experts, gathered at the Agencies for Nutrition Action conference in Wellington.

The focus of the conference was on promoting nutrition and physical activity in sustainable ways. It also highlighted that many sectors – such as conservation, education, transport, recreation, social development and local government – are well placed to influence nutrition and physical activity.

The pioneering Tiaka Tie project, designed to bring food security to the Torere Community in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, was presented to conference attendees. Permaculture designer, Moana Flowers, explained the plan to plant a perennial food forest in the area.

“The food forest will be marae based and is the first of its kind in the Bay of Plenty. It will be planted on land provided by some of the whanau here.

“The Ngaitai Iwi has been running a community garden for four years. We’ve always looked at traditional gardening using traditional knowledge, and many people in the community helped by ploughing and planting seeds. Even though we only started with a hundred seeds we managed to grow over 10,000 vegetables last year.

“Since we started the community garden, the number of backyard gardens has increased. There’s just more awareness of healthy eating in the area and people regularly ask for advice and knowledge about growing their own food.”

Having seen the success of the community garden, Moana Flowers decided to take the project one step further with funding from the Ministry of Health’s Healthy Eating-Healthy Action (HEHA) programme.

“We’re now adapting the community garden into a perennial food forest. We’ve got multistory layers of food, plants, orchards, vegetables, and herbs planned already. We’ve always got food security in mind and are focused on making sure we put more into the earth than what is taken out.”

Moana Flowers has already seen positive changes in the community, and hopes to see more once the food forest comes to life.

“Not only does the community have fresh vegetables to eat, but the sharing of stories and social connections has also been a big aspect. I’ve learned that people catch on through practical demonstration and I’m expecting the food forest idea will have a significant impact on the community as well. The kids at school are on fire for the idea of a food forest and have already learned all about it!”

She believes other communities can live sustainably and apply these practices to their own lives.

“There’s no one answer for everybody – every area is different but we can all work with what we’ve got, and traditional knowledge can really help alongside contemporary resources.

“When we look at the benefits for the community, we’re talking about future generations as well. Our grandchildren are really going to reap the benefits of what we’re doing now. Not only will they have food security but they’ll have the knowledge of where food comes from and know the importance of looking after the earth that provides it.”