



# Milestone for Māori Agribusiness project

Aleise Puketapu slowly shuffles backwards as she bends down to push peanuts into freshly ploughed soil in a Cape Runaway paddock.

The emerging Māori Plant and Food Research scientist is playing a key role in a major project funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to lift the productivity of Māori-owned land in the eastern Bay of Plenty.

MPI allocated \$700,000 to the Whangaparāoa Māori Lands Trust in 2019 to explore the potential of their whenua (land) near Tihirau (Cape Runaway) and to create jobs.

The project marked a milestone in November 2021, with Aleise and her colleague Brent Clothier planting small plots of trial crops.

“We have planted cultivars of kūmara, taewa (Māori potatoes), edamame beans and peanuts. It’s the first time peanuts have been sown in the area,” Dr Clothier said.

Crops have been planted at two sites. One is near Plant and Food Research’s weather station at Otamaroa. The other is next to Te Kura Mana Māori o Whangaparāoa.

“The purpose of these trials is to see how different cultivars grow in the area. We’ve used mulch on half the plots to measure its benefits on warming the soil,” Dr Clothier said.

MPI’s Māori Agribusiness team has been working with the Whangaparāoa landowners cluster since its Māori Agribusiness Extension (MABx) programme was launched in 2019.

The cluster is made up of representatives of the owners of 25 Māori land blocks and covers 18,000 hectares of land,

with about a third (6000 hectares) suitable for livestock, horticulture or arable farming.

The area has fertile soils and huge potential for high-value horticulture, generating economic opportunities and employment.

“The cluster undertook research to investigate options for profitable and sustainable land uses for their whenua. They refined more than 70 potential land-use options down to half a dozen, which aligned with their key aspirations,” said MPI’s director of Māori Agribusiness Robyn Meehan.

“They preferred a sustainable mixed land use kaupapa (policy) over a single crop. A total of 10 different crops, including the tactical use of livestock to rotate with cropping, is planned in the next phase of the programme.”

The mahi is part of the Government’s Fit for a Better World roadmap to increase the value of food and fibre sector exports by an extra \$44 billion over 10 years.

MPI’s Māori Agribusiness team has partnered with 26 Māori agribusiness clusters across the motu (country) since 2019, providing them with tools, support and information to find different uses for their whenua.

“It’s part of a \$12.2 million commitment over four years to provide farmer-to-farmer support to Māori landowners and trustees through the Māori Agribusiness Extension (MABx) programme,” Ms Meehan said

The Whangaparāoa landowners’ cluster is in the process of establishing a joint business entity and exploring funding, partnerships, and investments to implement land use choices.