



Food Secure Communities Evaluation

Final report

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Glossary of terms

This glossary provides definitions of terms, acronyms, and concepts used throughout the evaluation to support reader understanding of the Food Secure Communities programme and food security sector.

Term	Definition
Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance (AFRA)	A national organisation funded through FSC that builds capacity and capability across the food rescue sector through training, resources, and sector coordination.
Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure	A standardised tool developed by Kore Hiakai that quantifies the nutritional adequacy of food parcels. One standard food parcel provides three meals per day for four days for a family of four, compiled at 80% of nutritional guidelines.
Choice-based model	A food distribution approach where households select their own food items rather than receiving pre-packed parcels, supporting dignity and ensuring food meets household preferences and needs.
Community food provision	The delivery of food support to households experiencing food insecurity through various models including food parcels, social supermarkets, and community meals.
Food insecurity	The state of being without reliable access to sufficient quantities of affordable, nutritious food.
Food parcel	A collection of food items provided to households, typically including a mix of fresh produce, proteins, and pantry staples designed to provide multiple meals.
Food rescue	The practice of collecting surplus food that would otherwise be wasted from producers, manufacturers, retailers, and other sources, and redistributing it to those in need.
Food Secure Communities (FSC) programme	A Ministry of Social Development initiative established in 2020 to strengthen New Zealand's food security infrastructure through investment in national, regional, and local food distribution systems.
Food Security Initiatives	A component of the FSC programme providing seed funding (\$1.0 million in Budget 2025) for innovations aimed at strengthening community resilience and self-sufficiency, including cooperatives, social enterprises, and māra kai initiatives.
Hard infrastructure	Physical assets and equipment such as warehousing, refrigeration units, transport vehicles, and storage facilities that enable food collection, storage, and distribution.
Kore Hiakai	A national organisation funded through FSC that fosters sector collaboration, provides research insights, and develops practice tools and frameworks
Local food provider	Organisations operating at community level that deliver food support directly to households through various models including food banks, social supermarkets, and community cafés.
New Zealand Food Network (NZFN)	The national-level food rescue organisation funded through FSC that operates at scale by rescuing surplus food and purchasing bulk food, distributing through regional food hubs.



Term	Definition
Regional food hub	Organisations operating at regional level that rescue and distribute food, serving as intermediaries between NZFN and local food providers or distributing directly to communities
Social supermarket	A retail model where people can shop and select food items as in a regular supermarket, typically at significantly reduced prices or through a points system, maintaining dignity and choice for those experiencing food insecurity.
Supply chain	The network and processes involved in moving food from sources (producers, rescuers, purchasers) through various distribution levels to end recipients.
Three-tiered infrastructure	FSC programme's integrated infrastructure approach operating at national (NZFN, AFRA, Kore Hiakai), regional (regional food hubs), and local (community food providers) levels.

Executive Summary

Food Secure Communities (FSC) is a programme of government investment led by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to strengthen New Zealand's food security infrastructure and support households experiencing food insecurity. The programme aims to increase the capacity and capability of the food security system to source, store, and distribute food at scale, while supporting providers to respond to the diverse needs of food-insecure households. The programme operates at national, regional, and local levels across New Zealand.

MSD engaged *Allen + Clarke* to conduct an evaluation of the FSC programme. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the extent to which investment in national, regional, and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision has contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity; assess how well the programme has supported households experiencing food insecurity; and identify lessons learned for future food security investment.

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach drawing on quantitative data (administrative datasets from FSC-funded providers and a survey of hubs and providers) and qualitative data (key informant interviews with national-level organisations, interviews with regional food hubs and local food providers, and structured review of programme and contextual documents) to answer the key evaluation questions.

Key findings

KEQ1: To what extent has the investment in national, regional and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity?

FSC investment has built an effective three-tiered food distribution system with interconnected capacity at national, regional and local levels

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations within the food security ecosystem tended to work independently without coordinated connections. FSC investment has been effective in building a functioning three-tiered infrastructure in which capacity at each level enables and amplifies the effectiveness of the others. Regional hub infrastructure enables New Zealand Food Network (NZFN) to rescue food at a national scale by providing the distribution channels to move large volumes efficiently into communities. Similarly, local provider capacity amplifies regional hub effectiveness by creating the reach to distribute food onward to households experiencing food insecurity. This integrated investment across all three tiers makes large-scale food rescue and distribution possible, with the system functioning as an interconnected supply chain rather than isolated components.

Investment in hard infrastructure has increased system capacity to source, store and distribute food

The investment enabled organisations to receive and store larger volumes of rescued food, particularly perishables requiring refrigeration. Food volumes grew from 7.4 million to 10.4 million kilograms between 2023/24 and 2024/25, with 94% of providers reporting increased ability to provide food supplies. Increased storage capacity means local food providers can accept larger deliveries, reducing per-unit transport costs. Refrigeration enables the inclusion of nutritious fresh produce, which was often previously unavailable.

The programme also strengthened the regional hub layer by establishing new food rescue infrastructure in previously underserved areas such as the West Coast and Northland. At the national level, the establishment of NZFN substantially increased the sector's capacity to rescue surplus food at scale, enabling large-scale operations that process hundreds of pallets and redirect cancelled export orders and seasonal surpluses that would otherwise be wasted, while also providing bulk purchasing services that supplement rescued food at below-retail cost. Survey responses show nearly all food providers reported that the FSC investment increased their ability to provide food supplies to their community. The programme effectively connected the food security system to food production systems, reducing food waste through rescue and redistribution.

AFRA and Kore Hiakai have contributed to improved sector capability, research capacity and collaborative relationships

The evaluation found that AFRA has supported the food rescue sector to mature through providing guidance on food handling and food safety. AFRA's convening role through national and regional hui has built relationships and collaborative networks, with members sharing knowledge and connecting organisations to learn from each other's experiences.

Kore Hiakai has lifted capability through the introduction of the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure, which improved providers' awareness of nutritional requirements, leading to households receiving more nutritionally balanced food parcels. Kore Hiakai's research validated providers' lived experience of food insecurity drivers and provided evidence strengthening their practice and advocacy. Together, AFRA and Kore Hiakai have lifted the sector's profile, built understanding of food rescue's value, and supported a collective sector voice on food insecurity issues.

The investment also built stronger relationships at local and regional levels, with 65% of local food providers and 47% of regional food hubs that were surveyed reporting strengthened relationships. These enabled sharing of food sourcing contacts, trading resources when supply and demand were mismatched, and learning from each other's innovations. Providers actively coordinated to complement existing services and avoid duplication, contributing to system efficiency. For example, providers would assess what community services already existed (such as community gardens or youth programs) and then invest their efforts in filling other gaps, such as supporting schools not already part of lunch programmes.



NZFN has become a substantial food supplier, with experiences varying by organisation size and location

NZFN supplies food through two mechanisms: rescuing surplus food and household essentials (the majority of their operations) and purchasing bulk food at below-retail value on behalf of providers (a smaller component). Almost all regional food hubs welcomed food supplied by NZFN, though experiences with product consistency varied, reflecting the unpredictable nature of food rescue which depends on available surplus. NZFN was particularly valued as a food source for regions without large companies that donated food and as a source of other essential items such as nappies and toilet paper.

About three-quarters of regional food hubs interviewed reported that receiving food from NZFN substantially reduced food parcel costs by providing products that replaced items previously purchased locally. However, the other quarter (primarily small to medium-sized organisations) stated NZFN food had not substantially reduced costs, as basic pantry staples were not consistently available through rescue and still required purchase. Location was a contributing factor, with South Island providers more likely to report that purchasing food through NZFN was not necessarily cheaper due to more complex logistics.

FSC funding has enabled locally relevant innovations and alternative service delivery models

The outcomes-focused funding model enabled providers to develop approaches responding to specific community needs. FSC funding created organisational capacity to test approaches, learn what works, and adapt based on community response, with the Food Security Initiatives funding specifically supporting innovation. This enabled a shift from a focus on outputs (distributing food parcels) to outcomes (strengthening longer-term food security).

Providers developed diverse alternative models of community food support, including social supermarkets enabling household choice, community cafés providing free or koha-based meals, pop-up produce stalls selling directly from growers at low cost, and community gardens building skills while supplying produce. Educational initiatives included cooking classes, culturally appropriate recipe books, and guidance on using unfamiliar seasonal produce.

The programme has strengthened emergency response capacity

Regional food hubs, local food providers and national partners supported by FSC funding played critical roles during the 2023 North Island floods and Cyclone Gabrielle, with capacity to pivot rapidly into response mode. At the national level, NZFN provided emergency food stocks and coordinated large-scale distribution to affected regions. Regional hubs and local providers used FSC-funded infrastructure (transport, storage and staff, combined with established relationships across the supply chain) to surge capacity and support local emergency response and recovery. The three-tiered system enabled rapid response, with national infrastructure connecting into regional and local operations. Nearly all regional food hubs and local food providers involved in emergency response have built relationships with civil defence teams, with some now recognised as partners in the emergency preparedness system, attending civil defence meetings and developing business continuity plans.



FSC funding plays a central role in sustaining enhanced operational capability, but loss of funding would create system gaps

Survey findings showed FSC grants provided between 41% and 50% of the funding providers needed to deliver their food support services, reflecting that MSD is a contributory rather than primary funder. For most regional food hubs and local food providers, FSC funding serves as critical baseline operational funding covering staff salaries, rent, electricity and warehouse costs that are difficult to fund from other sources. Additionally, FSC funding enables organisations to access other funding sources, as many philanthropic trusts require applicants to demonstrate baseline funding before applications can be made. For national partners where MSD is the primary funder, the programme sustains NZFN's national distribution model and rescue operations, AFRA's convening and capability-building functions, and Kore Hiakai's research and sector development work.

FSC funding is central to several enhanced capabilities across the system. It supports staffing levels that enable relationship-building with whānau and holistic assessment of household needs rather than transactional food distribution. The funding maintains infrastructure capacity for emergency response including storage, equipment and staff to surge rapidly during crises. It enables choice-based and mana-enhancing approaches to food distribution and supports capacity to manage diverse food sourcing including unpredictable rescue volumes.

Over 80% of providers surveyed stated that they would experience significant service reductions or closure without FSC funding. Most regional food hubs and local food providers stated they would need to reduce staff numbers, resulting in fewer open days, loss of expertise, and reduction in service lines. For organisations where FSC plays a foundational role, loss of funding would likely result in service reductions beyond pre-FSC levels of operation. The interdependent nature of the three-tiered infrastructure means capacity loss at any level creates system-wide bottlenecks. System gaps would likely develop in operational capacity (reduced staffing, fewer open days), geographic coverage (potential closure of newer operations in previously underserved areas), supply chain reliability (businesses reconsidering food rescue partnerships), and emergency response capability (loss of surge capacity and institutional knowledge).

KEQ2: How well has the programme supported households experiencing food insecurity?

FSC investment has strengthened provider capacity to respond to diverse household needs through strategic partnerships and network development

The evaluation found that FSC's strategic approach to provider network development was effective in improving reach to diverse communities experiencing food insecurity. MSD regional teams undertook early engagement to identify partners with strong connections to priority communities. This intentional partnering with Pacific, Māori, Ethnic Communities, and other specialist providers created a more effective network than would have been achieved through traditional provider relationships alone. The resulting network diversity strengthened the system's ability to meet diverse household needs and created pathways for connecting households to broader support services.



Provider survey responses indicate the FSC investment was effective in increasing reach to priority populations. Approximately three in five providers (around 60%) reported that FSC funding has enabled them to better reach Māori, Pacific peoples, Ethnic Communities, and European/Pākehā over time, with similar proportions (53-57%) reporting improved reach across different household types and income sources. A lower percentage of providers (45%) reported enhanced reach to those living rurally. Interview findings indicated that about 40% of providers did not report increased reach to all population groups primarily because FSC funding represented too small a proportion of total costs to enable substantial expansion, or because geographic location or community demographics limited potential reach to certain groups.

FSC investment has enabled providers to deliver support that maintains household mana and dignity

FSC investment in local food provider capacity created the conditions for providers to spend time building relationships and trust with families/whānau. Local food providers reported it can take two or three visits to build the trust needed to understand circumstances and needs. With improved capacity, providers can build on initial engagement, spending time with whānau to understand their situation and develop appropriate responses including referral to other services. Four providers that were interviewed developed proactive outreach approaches enabled by increased capacity, such as social workers dedicated to finding older people who need help rather than waiting for them to seek assistance.

The additional funding created capacity for providers to create welcoming, mana-enhancing environments that reduced the shame and stigma households experience when seeking food support. Local food providers described drawing on guidance from Kore Hiakai and other entities to strengthen their practice of providing flexibility, choice, and manaakitanga.

Evidence indicates FSC programme support has contributed to improvements in household food security, nutrition, financial stability and wellbeing

Local food providers reported that food insecurity is seldom due to poor financial decision-making. Instead, households experiencing food insecurity typically prioritize non-negotiable costs such as rent and power, with food becoming the "negotiable" cost that can be reduced when resources are stretched. Food insecurity is typically triggered by cost-of-living pressures combined with unexpected expenses such as urgent car repairs, large power bills, or school costs.

FSC investment has contributed to improved nutritional quality of food reaching households through multiple interconnected mechanisms. Expanded food rescue substantially increased volumes of fresh produce through the system, shifting food parcel composition toward more nutritionally balanced options. This has contributed to households not only receiving but effectively using more nutritious food than would otherwise be accessible. However, the unpredictable nature of rescued food means providers and households cannot always access specific items they need.

The programme has supported broader financial outcomes. Food parcels reduce household food expenditure, enabling households to reallocate resources toward rent, utilities, and debt

repayment. Almost all providers either require or strongly encourage engagement with budget services, with some making budgeting engagement complementary to ongoing food support.

Provider survey results showed that 76% of providers reported that recipients had shared with them that food support decreased stress levels and improved their mental or physical health some or more of the time. Given this reflects only unprompted feedback, the actual impact on recipient stress and wellbeing may be higher. These findings align with independent research conducted by Kore Hiakai, which found 93% of whānau surveyed indicated positive impact on emotional wellbeing and mental health through receiving food support. Providers described how food support alleviates acute stress and anxiety, with this stress reduction having cascading effects on mental health and longer-term physical health. There was also evidence that food support helped maintain household participation in education and employment, with 85% of providers reporting that food support helped recipients stay engaged in training or employment some or more of the time, and 73% reporting that children in supported households stayed engaged in educational activities some or more of the time. Providers linked food security to children's educational outcomes, observing that regular school attendance becomes possible when children have food at home and in their lunchboxes, and families can afford to support participation in school activities.

These outcomes reflect how food support creates foundational stability by removing the acute anxiety of meeting basic family needs. This then enables households to focus on longer-term goals including education, employment, and financial stability. Enhanced provider capacity has also created opportunities for skill development and reciprocal engagement, with some recipients becoming volunteers at the service. This helps maintain mana and builds confidence, which provides space for households to work towards broader goals.

FSC investment has amplified impact beyond direct food provision, creating system-level changes that strengthen community capacity, enable innovation, and generate environmental value alongside social outcomes.

KEQ3: What lessons have been learned?

Based on the evaluation findings, the following lessons have been identified. These lessons are intended to provide transferable principles about programme design and implementation that can inform future food security investment decisions.

1. System design and interdependencies are an important determinant of effectiveness. The three-tiered infrastructure's effectiveness derives from how levels work together, with capacity at each level enabling or constraining the others. Investment decisions should not be made in isolation for individual tiers.
2. Contributory operational funding enables enhanced capability beyond organisational viability for regional hubs and local food providers. Flexible operational funding covering staff, rent, and utilities creates capacity to innovate, build relationships, and deliver mana-enhancing support beyond basic service delivery.
3. Primary funding sustains essential national-level operations. For national partners (NZFN, AFRA, Kore Hiakai) where MSD is the primary funder, FSC funding sustains



core functions that enable the entire three-tiered system to operate. This includes NZFN's national distribution model and rescue operations, AFRA's convening and capability-building functions, and Kore Hiakai's research and sector development work. Without continued FSC funding, these essential national-level operations would cease.

4. Capability building alongside infrastructure investment amplifies effectiveness. AFRA and Kore Hiakai's work alongside hard infrastructure created sector-wide improvements in food safety, nutritional awareness, and culturally responsive practice that infrastructure alone would not achieve.
5. Outcomes-focused funding enables locally relevant innovation and responses. Flexibility to test approaches and adapt based on results enables providers to develop diverse, locally-tailored solutions that meet specific community needs more effectively than standardised approaches. This same flexibility was critical during emergencies, allowing providers to rapidly pivot operations, scale up capacity, and respond to changing needs without requiring new approvals or contract amendments.
6. Food provision functions as gateway rather than endpoint, and can change household trajectories. Food provision, combined with adequate capacity to build relationships, addresses underlying drivers of food insecurity rather than simply providing relief.
7. Mana-enhancing delivery approaches affect household willingness to access support. How food is delivered affects household willingness to access support and engage with services, making delivery approaches as important as whether food is provided.
8. Diverse provider networks improve reach to priority populations. Strategic partnerships with Māori, Pacific and other specialist providers improved reach and culturally appropriate support to diverse populations.
9. Emergency response capability requires sustained baseline capacity. The infrastructure, staffing, relationships, and institutional knowledge needed for emergency response must be sustained during business-as-usual periods rather than built when crises occur.

1 The Food Secure Communities Programme

The Food Secure Communities (FSC) programme was established by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in 2020 as part of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its objective was to enable the community food system to efficiently source and distribute healthy, nutritious food at scale and at lower cost to people experiencing food insecurity.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social and financial drivers of food insecurity while disrupting food supply chains through lockdowns, self-isolation requirements, and distribution constraints. MSD identified that existing income support and Special Needs Grants for food were insufficient to meet rapidly increasing demand for food support.

In response, MSD established the FSC programme, drawing on its national and regional presence and networks across New Zealand. The programme invested heavily in expanding the capability and capacity of national, regional, and local food distribution infrastructure. This infrastructure aimed to leverage both food system efficiencies (such as regional expertise and food rescue capability) and existing inefficiencies (such as surplus food being wasted or poorly distributed) to alleviate food insecurity, primarily by redirecting surplus food to communities most in need. Since 2020, the Government has invested more than \$230 million in the programme. A Theory of Change of the programme is provided in **Appendix A**.

1.1 Current context

Post-COVID-19, demand for community food support has remained high, driven by ongoing cost-of-living pressures. In October 2022, the Minister for Social Development and Employment reaffirmed the programme's focus across three interconnected areas: maintaining community food distribution infrastructure and increasing sector coordination; seed funding for food security initiatives; and supporting community food providers to meet demand in communities most vulnerable to food insecurity. Funding for the programme was secured until June 2025.

Through Budget 2025, the Government reprioritised \$15 million for one further year (1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026) to maintain existing community food distribution infrastructure. Funding is allocated across national partners, regional food hubs, local food providers, food security initiatives, and this programme evaluation.

The FSC programme has two main functions operating in different contexts. Due to FSC investment in infrastructure, the sector has enhanced capability to surge support during emergencies, to ensure continuity of food provision. For example, during COVID-19, the FSC programme addressed simultaneous increases in food insecurity and surplus food by leveraging food system efficiencies to reduce both hunger and food waste. In 2023, FSC responded to the North Island Severe Weather Events, delivering food to affected regions within hours, ahead of wider government responses. While the infrastructure enables rapid response, depending on the size of the emergency, additional funding may be required to procure extra bulk food supplies.

Outside of emergencies, the programme supports households and communities experiencing food insecurity while increasingly addressing underlying drivers of chronic demand. This partly includes a shift toward building resilience and self-sufficiency through initiatives such as social supermarkets, in addition to existing services such as financial and employment mentoring, capability building, and other services that extend beyond direct food provision.

1.2 Programme delivery model

FSC supports national, regional, and local food infrastructure and community food provision through the following delivery model.

- National distribution infrastructure (\$6.4 million in Budget 2025). Three partner organisations operate at a national level:
 - The New Zealand Food Network (NZFN) operates at scale nationally through two mechanisms: rescuing surplus food that would otherwise go to waste and purchasing bulk food at below-retail value when donated or rescued food is insufficient. NZFN sources primarily from producers, processors, manufacturers, and donors, and distributes through regional food hubs, which then distribute to local food providers. At times, NZFN also distributes food directly to local food providers.
 - Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance (AFRA) builds the capacity and capability across the food rescue sector. Its membership includes organisations operating at both regional (food hubs) and local (food providers) levels. AFRA supports sector best practice, develops data platforms, and provides training and resources that strengthen connections across the food distribution system.
 - Kore Hiakai was established by large community food distributors to foster sector collaboration, provide research insights, and develop practice tools and frameworks. Kore Hiakai developed the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure, which provides a standardised approach to measuring nutritional adequacy of food parcels, and the Mana to Mana Framework, which centres dignity and mana in food distribution practice. Kore Hiakai also conducts research on food insecurity drivers (including income inadequacy, food sovereignty, and root causes of food poverty), collates sector insights on emerging practices such as social supermarkets, and represents sector perspectives in media and government policy submissions.
- Regional distribution infrastructure (\$1.5 million for up to 50 food hubs): Regional food hubs (primarily existing food rescue organisations) maintain distribution infrastructure at the regional level, sourcing, rescuing, and distributing surplus food. Hubs either distribute food directly to communities or act as intermediaries between NZFN and local food providers, enabling high-volume collection and targeted delivery.
- Local infrastructure and community food provision (\$6.0 million for up to 60 local food providers): Local food providers deliver food support at the local level. Most were already established, with the FSC programme providing contributory funding to expand



capacity and infrastructure in response to increased demand. Local food providers deliver food parcels, operate social supermarkets, offer wraparound support, and deliver community-led initiatives such as food growing, cooking classes, financial capability programmes, and youth support that complement their core functions.

Some organisations, such as The Salvation Army, operate across multiple levels of this system, functioning as both regional hubs and local providers.

In addition, the programme funds Food Security Initiatives (\$1.0 million) that aim to strengthen community resilience and self-sufficiency, including co-operatives, social enterprises, and at-scale māra kai initiatives on pathways to sustainability. While some FSC-funded providers accessed Food Security Initiatives funding, the effectiveness of this funding line was not a specific focus of this evaluation.

MSD is the primary funder of national infrastructure and a contributory funder of regional and local infrastructure and food provision, with funding proportionate to the scale and nature of operations.

1.3 FSC grants and food volumes

Between 2020 and 2025, there have been twenty-six FSC grant rounds ranging in value from \$1 million to \$49 million, distributed to around 520 providers across all years. The largest grant allocations were to food distribution infrastructure (\$89 million), community food provision (\$58 million), and Covid related Care-in-the-Community (CIC) funding (\$56 million) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: FSC funding over time

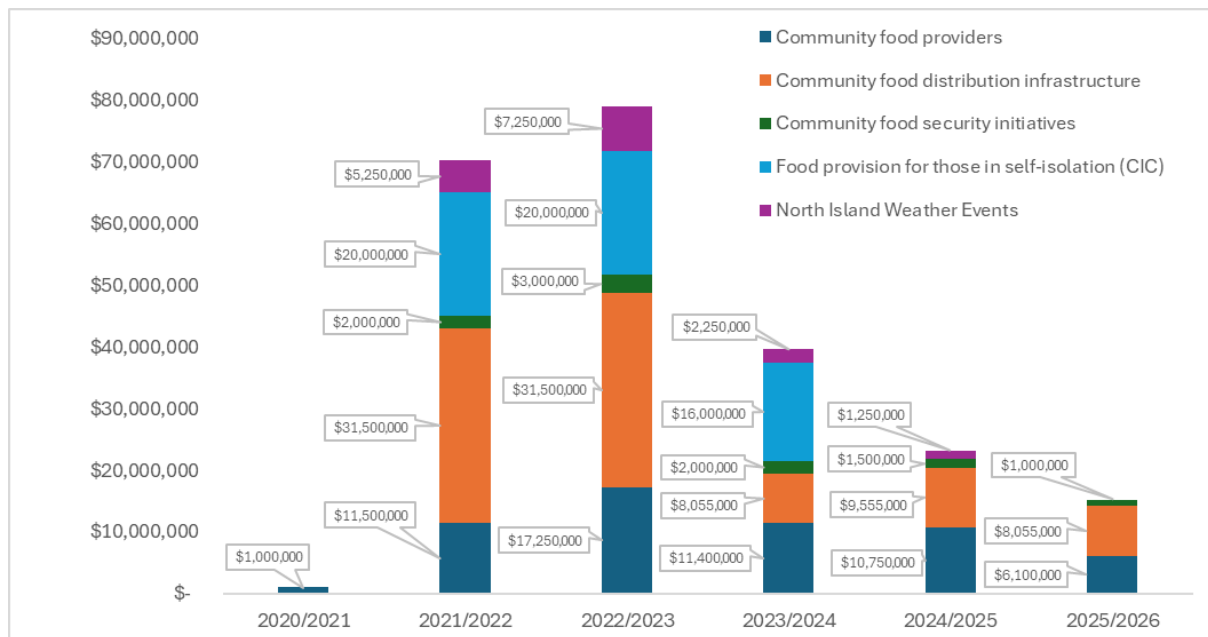


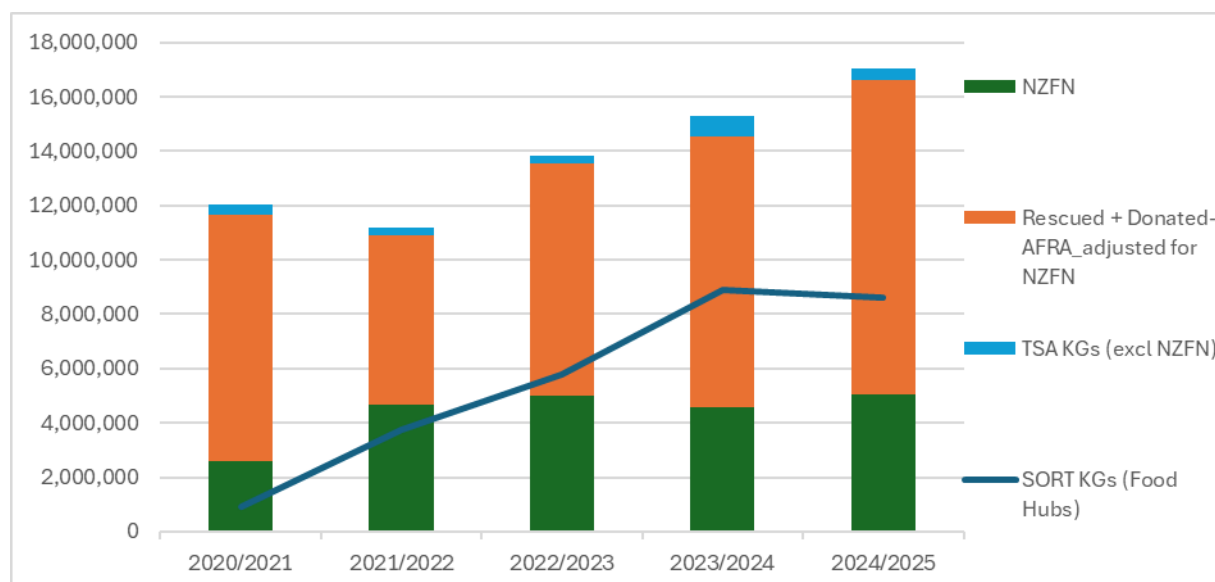
Figure 2 compares food volumes from MSD SORT data with administrative data from the two largest national organisations (NZFN and AFRA) and the largest combined food hub and food provision service (The Salvation Army (TSA)). SORT volumes (blue line) are lower in 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 than the combined organisational data (total bar height). The



difference could be explained by some providers reporting only food package data or food volumes to MSD.

The combined provider data indicates that food volumes continue to grow, as indicated by rescued food volumes climbing from 7.4 million kilograms in 2023/2024 to 10.4 million kilograms in 2024/2025 (AFRA admin data). This growth is potentially driven by a number of factors including the growth of the infrastructure needed to collect, store and distribute food, and efficiencies gained by greater interconnectedness between food rescue organisations and food producers. Between 2020 and 2024 conservative estimates of total food volumes show that the system processed around 12 million kilograms of food in 2020/2021 rising to 17 million kilograms by 2024/2025.

Figure 2: Food volumes 2020/2021 to 2024/2025 for SORT and food hub volumes¹



Reported food parcel counts (Figure 3) show a different pattern than food volumes, with parcels peaking in 2021/2022 during COVID-19 then declining, while food volumes (Figure 2) continued to grow. This trend is related to both decreased total MSD funding for providers and the number of funded providers decreasing after 2021/2022, meaning fewer providers reporting how many parcels have been delivered to MSD.

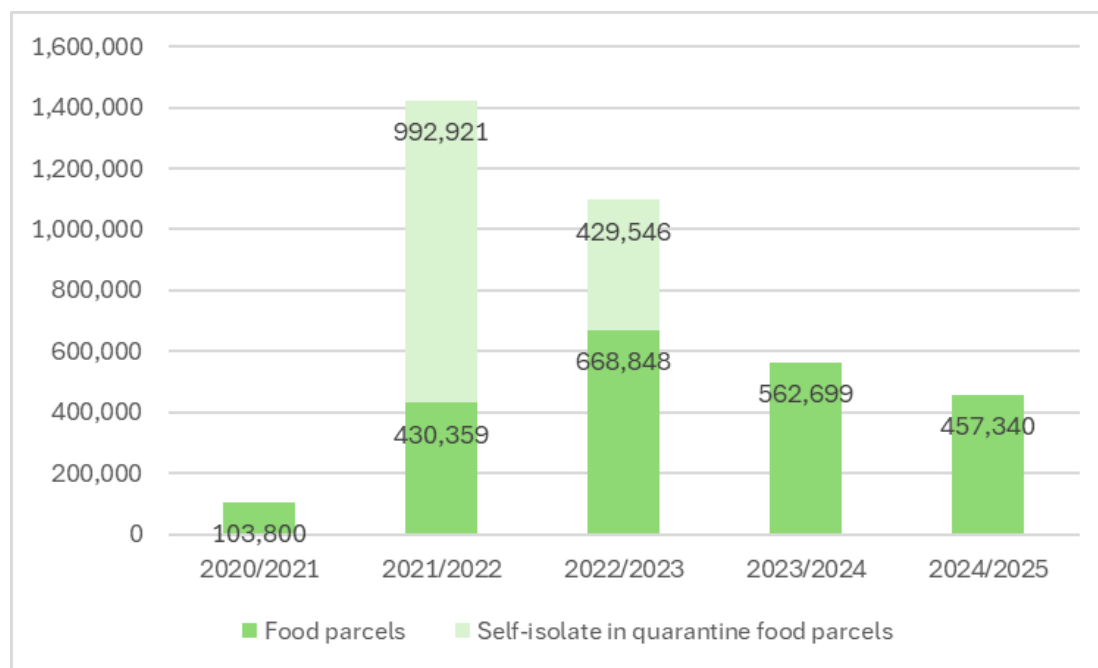
This different pattern reflects variations in data collection methods rather than actual gaps in service. Contractually, food hubs report volumes in kilograms while local providers report parcel counts. However, some organisations report both metrics (particularly those receiving both hub and provider funding like TSA), while others report only one. Because SORT does not differentiate between providers and hubs, it is not possible to identify instances of missing data or double counting.

¹ 'SORT kilograms (Food Hubs)' are volumes reported via the SORT tool; 'Rescued + Donated-AFRA, adjusted for NZFN' are volumes that AFRA reported as being distributed via AFRA hubs after removing estimated food volumes received from NZFN; 'NZFN' are food volumes sourced from NZFN; 'TSA KGs (excl NZFN)' are food volumes reported by TSA as being directly donated to TSA.



Interviews with key informants indicate that regional food hubs and local food providers' capacity and capability to collect and report data is mixed. Many regional food hubs and local food providers are small organisations with very limited financial resources and lack robust data reporting systems, especially in early years of the investment. Larger food hubs typically have more resources available and are better positioned to collect reliable data. In addition, there has been variability in the approaches used to collect data, including differing definitions of what constitutes a "food parcel" (e.g., parcel size, number of meals, number of people served). AFRA has been developing a data platform designed to make it easier for its members to collect quality data. Moreover, not all rescued food will be packaged and distributed as food parcels due to operational capacity limitations (funding and staffing limits), the quality of the rescued food may not match what the community needs or is expired, and distribution logistics challenges may prevent some food from getting to households in a timely or cost-effective manner.

Figure 3: Food parcels 2020/2021 to 2024/2025 (SORT data).



2 The evaluation

MSD engaged *Allen + Clarke* to undertake an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the Food Secure Communities programme.

2.1 Evaluation objectives

The objectives of this evaluation were:

- To understand the contribution FSC infrastructure and community food provision has made at national, regional, and local levels, both during business-as-usual operations and emergency management response and recovery periods.
- To identify which households benefit from FSC, in what ways, and under what circumstances.
- To assess the contribution the FSC programme has made to the food security ecosystem, including identifying what gaps (if any) it fills that would otherwise not be addressed by other interventions or market mechanisms.

2.2 Key evaluation questions

In line with the objectives described above, the evaluation investigated the following key evaluation questions (KEQs):

1. To what extent has the investment in national, regional and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity?
2. How well has the programme supported households experiencing food insecurity?
3. What lessons have been learned?

The KEQs were operationalised into criteria that were used to assess FSC programme performance, sub-questions to guide the evaluative inquiry, data sources to gather evidence, and indicators that articulate what success ‘looks like’ for the FSC programme.

Together, these formed the framework for evaluating the FSC programme. The evaluation framework (KEQs, criteria, sub-questions, data sources and indicators) is provided in **Appendix B**.

2.3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation assessed the nature and extent of the contribution that investment through the FSC programme made to supporting households experiencing food insecurity. Given the complexity of FSC as a multi-tiered intervention operating within a broader food security



ecosystem,² the evaluation focused on understanding both *what* was achieved and *how and why* outcomes occurred in different contexts.

A mixed-methods approach was used, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data to answer the key evaluation questions (KEQs). Each method served a distinct evaluative purpose: qualitative methods provided depth of understanding about programme implementation, mechanisms of impact, and contextual influences, while quantitative analysis established the scale, reach, and efficiency of FSC investment across national, regional, and local levels. Details of the data collection methods are provided below.

2.3.1 Contextual document review

A structured review of programme and contextual documents was undertaken to inform the evaluation framework and analysis. This included FSC programme documentation (such as the theory of change and internal MSD reports), sector research on food insecurity, and selected evaluation and case study reports from FSC-funded initiatives. The review supported understanding of the programme's evolution, intended outcomes, and positioning within the wider food insecurity ecosystem.

2.3.2 Qualitative interviews

To gain in-depth understanding of how FSC operated in practice, mechanisms through which outcomes were achieved, and contextual factors affecting effectiveness, the evaluation included semi-structured qualitative interviews with 28 participants. This included:

- six interviews with national-level stakeholders, which explored the purpose and design of FSC, how the national, regional, and local components operated together, perceived effectiveness, and differences between business-as-usual and emergency response contexts. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across policy, funding, coordination, and delivery roles.
- 22 interviews with FSC regional food hubs and local food providers. These were undertaken to provide in-depth insights into how FSC operates in different contexts. While the evaluation initially planned to conduct case studies in three regions, the approach evolved to capture a broader range of contexts as additional providers requested to participate. Purposive sampling selected regional food hubs and local food providers across Auckland, Tairāwhiti/Hawke's Bay, Canterbury, West Coast, Northland, Wellington, Nelson, and Tauranga. These interviews explored implementation experiences, coordination, outcomes for households, and contextual factors affecting effectiveness. To the extent possible, the interviews included hubs and providers that work together, enabling complementary perspectives on hub-provider coordination from different levels of the system.

² The food security ecosystem includes programmes that provide free or subsidised food such as school lunch and breakfast programmes; government hardship assistance to individuals/whānau, such as Special Needs Grants for food; and community food provision not funded through the Food Secure Communities programme (e.g., community gardens, pātaka kai)

2.3.3 Survey of FSC providers

An online survey of FSC-funded hubs and providers was conducted to test the generalisability of findings from interviews by capturing experiences across all funded providers, complementing the in-depth understanding gained through interviews. The survey focused on the functioning of FSC infrastructure and community food provision, operational challenges and enablers, and perceived outcomes.

The survey was distributed by Allen + Clarke using the Qualtrics survey platform. Email addresses for current FSC regional food hubs and local food providers were provided via secure IronKey and stored in a secure folder. These email addresses had a random identifier associated with each to ensure anonymity in analysis. The survey was sent to all FSC hubs and providers who had a current contract to provide FSC services and for whom a valid email address was available.

In total, the survey was sent to 83 hubs and providers, with a reminder sent one week after the initial distribution. National partners (AFRA, Kore Hiakai and NZFN) did not participate in the survey as they were engaged through key informant interviews instead. The response rate was 71%, with 59 completed responses returned. The survey data were cleaned to remove incomplete responses, outliers, or responses that did not provide information relevant to key evaluation criteria.

Only the funding type and region questions were compulsory, meaning the number of respondents varied across questions. Throughout the report, figures specify the number of respondents who answered each specific question (shown as N= in figure captions and text).

Of the 59 respondents, thirty-three reported receiving a food provider grant, fourteen a food hub grant, and twelve both grants (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of respondents receiving a community food hub grant and/or a community food providers grant (N=59)

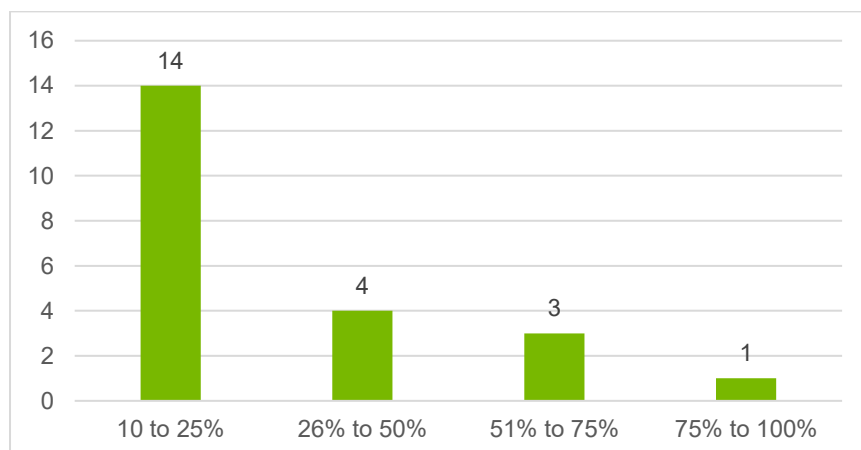
Type of FSC grant received	Counts
Food hub grant	14
Food provider grant	33
Food hub & food provider	12

Respondents who received a food provider grant were asked additional questions about their ability to provide food to their community, and their reach and engagement with Māori and priority population groups including Pacific peoples, children and young people, older people, disabled people, and rural populations. These questions also explored the income sources and household types accessing support, enabling assessment of whether FSC investment reached those most in need.

Respondents who reported they had received a community food hub grant were also asked “on average, what percentage of the food you provided was received from the New Zealand Food Network”. Twenty-two of the 26 organisations receiving food hub grants answered this question. The results (Figure 4) show that 30% of food was provided by NZFN on average,

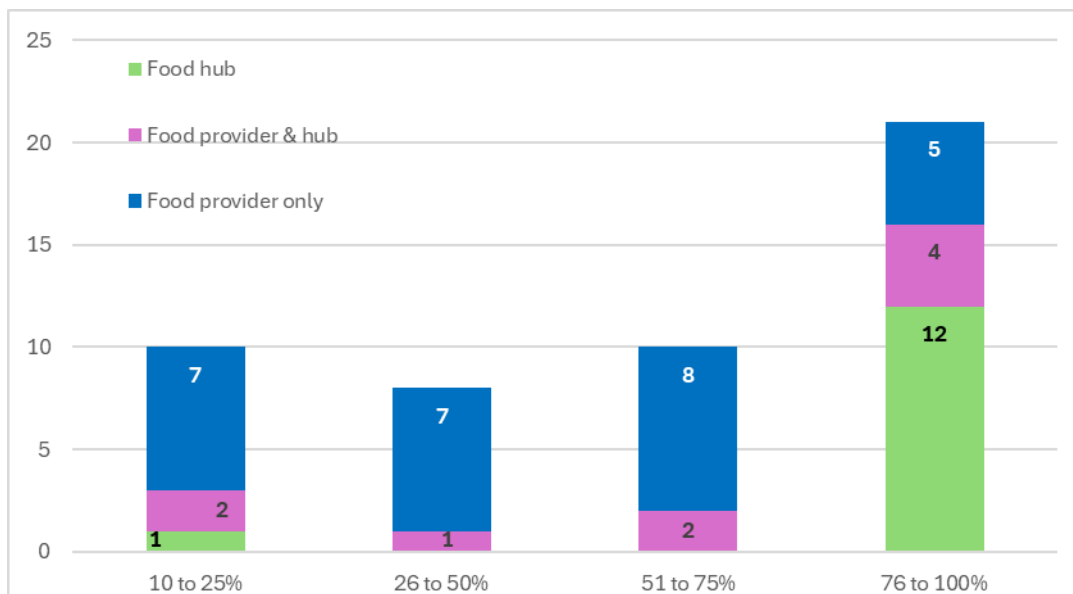
but the majority (14 of 22 organisations answering the question) reported receiving between 10% and 25% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of food provided by NZFN (N=22)



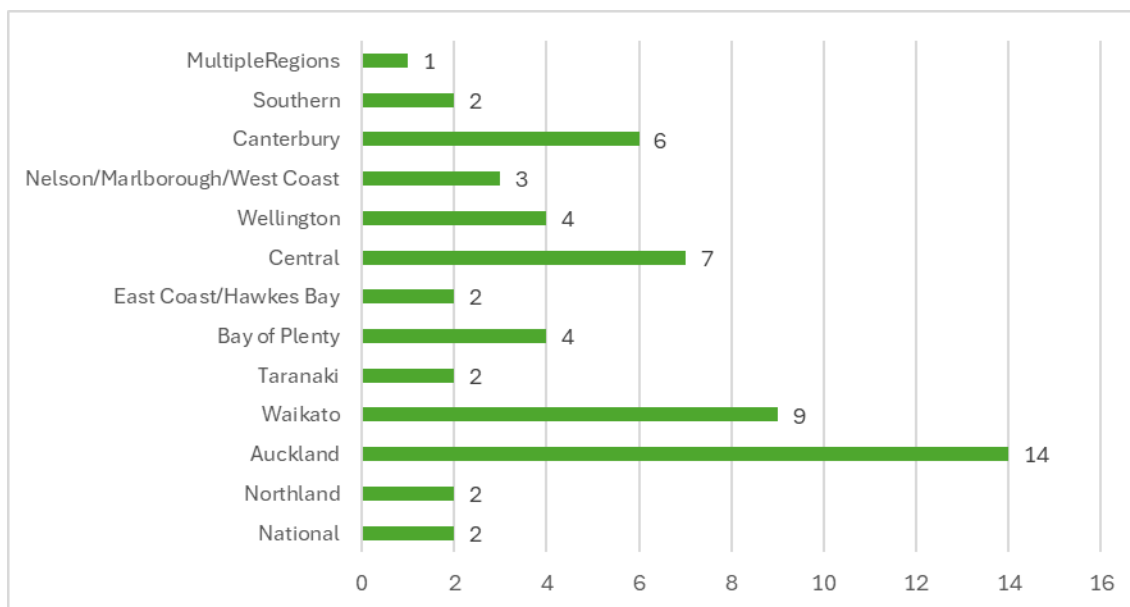
Similarly, all respondents reported what percentage of all food they distributed was from rescued or donated sources (Figure 5). Results show that on average 63% of food was from rescued or donated sources. This includes food rescued directly by hubs from local sources (supermarkets, growers, producers) as well as donated food received from NZFN and other sources. For those receiving food hub grants, the distribution was: 2 of 22 organisations reported 10-25% was rescued or donated, 2 of 22 reported 26-50%, 3 of 22 reported 51-75%, and 16 of 22 reported 75-100% (with 8 reporting 100%). For organisations who received food provider grants only, the distribution was: 7 of 27 organisations reported 10-25% was rescued or donated, 7 of 27 reported 26-50%, 8 of 27 reported 51-75%, and 5 of 27 reported 75-100% (with 3 reporting 100%).

Figure 5: Proportion of food rescued or donated (N=50)



Survey responses provided coverage across national, regional, and local food providers to draw reliable conclusions about programme functioning and effectiveness (Figure 6). Fourteen respondent organisations were based in Auckland, nine in Waikato, seven in Central region, and six in Canterbury, with the remainder distributed across Aotearoa New Zealand. Two organisations were nationally focused.

Figure 6: Number of respondents by region (N=59)



Of the 59 respondents, 34 respondents received FSC funding in 2020/2021 rising to 59 respondents in 2024/2025 (Table 2).



Table 2: Financial years received FSC funding (N=59)

Financial year	Number of participants
2020/2021	34
2021/2022	42
2022/2023	50
2023/2024	54
2024/2025	59

2.3.4 Interrogation of secondary data

The evaluation analysed available administrative and monitoring data from MSD, national partners, and providers. The purpose was to establish the scale of FSC operations, verify provider-reported experiences with objective performance data, and track changes over time. The analysis included data on FSC investment, food volumes collected and distributed, and food parcels delivered.

The two primary measures available were kilograms of food rescued or donated, and the number of food parcels delivered. These measures capture different aspects of the FSC system:

- Kilograms of food rescued or donated reflects the volume of food moving through the supply chain - how much food is collected (through rescue or purchase) and distributed from national partners to regional food hubs and from hubs to local food providers. This measure tracks the scale of operations across the three-tiered system but does not account for wastage (e.g., spoiled food or food that was not distributed to households as it did not meet their needs).
- Food parcels delivered reflects what reaches households, i.e., the number of food parcels distributed by local food providers to households as reported in MSD's SORT tool. This measure indicates the end point of the supply chain and household reach.

Administrative data from MSD was extracted from provider reports and accessed through the SORT provider reporting tool. Administrative data from NZFN, AFRA, and The Salvation Army (TSA) were merged with adjustments made to avoid double counting. Specifically, a portion of food donated to AFRA members came from NZFN. AFRA carried out an internal analysis on a sample of their supplier data to determine what proportion came from NZFN, finding that on average 55% of donated food to those providers came from NZFN. To avoid double counting, all food reported as being donated to AFRA was reduced by 45% in the merged dataset. Rescued food volumes were unaffected by this adjustment. Similarly, reported TSA food volumes excluded NZFN donations as TSA were able to filter out NZFN contributions from their reported totals.

Household-level TSA data combined numbers from 2022/2023, 2023/2024, and 2024/2025 and reported proportions as a representative example of community-level distributions of support by ethnicity, household type, and income source. TSA data was valuable as it spans

multiple communities and has reliable data collection systems. Data from before 2023 was not included in the analysis as there were inconsistencies in what was collected, such as information about the number of people requesting food parcels was not reliably collected and food parcel size options differed from those used from 2023 onwards.

Consistent food volume data for the financial years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 was not available, as the SORT reporting tool was not introduced until 2023. Several conversion metrics exist for estimating volumes from parcel counts, including using 450 grams as a standard food parcel weight and the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure (which defines one food parcel as providing three meals per day for four days to a family of four).

To test whether these metrics could reliably convert food parcels to volumes, the evaluation team applied them to 2022/2023 data where both parcel counts and actual food volumes were known. Using the calculation: number of food parcels ÷ 0.45 (grams/kilogram) × 3 meals × 4 days × 4 people, the resulting estimated volume was 6-12 times higher than the actual volumes reported by NZFN, AFRA, and TSA. This over-estimation indicates the conversion metrics substantially inflate volumes. Given that NZFN, AFRA, and TSA represent the largest food distribution operations in the FSC system, it is implausible that other food rescue or donation services outside of these three organisations would collect over six times their combined volume. This confirmed the conversion metrics were unreliable for estimating historical volumes.

Further modelling to develop a more accurate conversion metric was not possible with the available data. Instead, a simple ratio of known volumes to food parcels was generated using 2022/2023 data (the closest year to the missing data). A conservative ratio of 8.7 food parcels per kilogram was used to estimate food volumes for 2021/2022 and 2020/2021, based on MSD reported food parcel numbers (668,848 parcels) and volumes (5,795,991 kilograms) for 2022/2023. This provides indicative estimates for trend analysis, though these estimates should be interpreted cautiously given the data limitations.

2.4 Data analysis and synthesis

2.4.1 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and open-text survey responses were analysed thematically. Data were deductively coded against the KEQs and evaluation criteria, alongside inductive analysis to identify emerging themes and unanticipated findings. Analysis examined similarities and differences across national, regional, and local levels, provider types, and contextual settings.

2.4.2 Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive methods to examine patterns in reach, scale, and efficiency across the FSC network. Given the small sample sizes and the contributory evaluation design, the analysis focused on establishing breadth of experiences and triangulating quantitative patterns with qualitative insights rather than conducting inferential statistical analysis.



Administrative and performance data from MSD, national partners, and selected providers were analysed descriptively, including food distribution volumes, client reach, operational metrics, and demographic characteristics of households accessing support. Trends over time were examined by comparing data across financial years (2020/2021 to 2024/2025) to track growth in food volumes, parcels distributed, and provider numbers.

Survey data were analysed as follows:

- Frequencies and counts were calculated for all closed-ended questions, with results presented as both numbers and percentages
- Given the small sample size (N=59), statistical significance testing was not conducted; instead, patterns were described using frequencies and proportions
- Where feasible, responses were compared across provider types (food hub grant recipients vs food provider grant recipients) and regions to identify variations in experiences
- Open-text responses were coded thematically and integrated with qualitative interview findings.

Cross-source triangulation was used throughout the analysis. Quantitative findings from administrative data and surveys were compared with qualitative insights from interviews to verify patterns, explore explanatory factors, and develop evaluative judgments about programme effectiveness. For example, survey data showing that 56% of providers reported capability increases from AFRA/Kore Hiakai was triangulated with interview data exploring how and why this capability building occurred, enabling assessment of mechanisms and contextual factors affecting effectiveness.

Findings were presented using tables, charts, and visualisations to support interpretation, with figure captions consistently specifying sample sizes (N=) to support appropriate interpretation of results.

2.4.3 Synthesis and sense-checking

Findings from qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated to develop a comprehensive understanding of FSC's effectiveness, contribution to the food insecurity system, and outcomes for households.

A sense-making workshop was conducted with MSD personnel to review preliminary findings, provide contextual information, and validate evaluative reasoning.

2.5 Evaluative judgements

This evaluation uses a criteria-based approach to make evaluative judgements about FSC programme performance. For each KEQ, the evaluation framework (provided in **Appendix B**) articulated evaluation criteria and indicators of success that define what effective programme performance looks like.

Evaluative judgements were made at the indicator level using two dimensions.

- **Achievement** assesses the extent to which each indicator was met:
 - Fully achieved: The indicator was fully achieved based on available evidence
 - Partially achieved: Some but not all elements of the indicator were achieved, or experiences were mixed across organisations, regions, or contexts
 - Not achieved: The indicator was not achieved based on available evidence
- **Evidence certainty** assesses the robustness of evidence supporting each judgement:
 - High: Multiple data sources provide consistent findings with representative coverage across the provider network
 - Medium: The finding is supported by two or more data sources but with limitations, such as provider perspective only (without household-level verification), variation in responses across subgroups, or gaps in coverage
 - Low: The finding relies on a single data source, limited sample, has significant evidence gaps, or was outside the evaluation scope

Evaluative judgements were developed through systematic review of all evaluation evidence against each indicator. This involved the following process:

- Evidence synthesis: For each indicator, relevant findings were identified across quantitative data (administrative data, survey responses) and qualitative data (interviews with key informants, regional food hubs, and local food providers)
- Triangulation: Multiple data sources were compared to identify consistent patterns, variations across contexts, and areas where evidence was limited or conflicting
- Contextual assessment: Judgements considered contextual factors affecting indicator achievement where feasible, including organisation size, geographic location, pre-existing infrastructure, and the proportion of total funding represented by FSC grants
- Team deliberation: The evaluation team developed ratings collaboratively to ensure consistent application of rating criteria and appropriate interpretation of evidence
- Peer review: Evaluative judgements were reviewed as part of the peer review of the evaluation report by a senior *Allen + Clarke* evaluation specialist to check evaluative reasoning and ensure judgements were well-supported by evidence.

Summary assessment tables are provided at the end of each KEQ section (sections 3.1.6 and 3.2.3). These tables present the rating for each indicator alongside a brief justification and any relevant caveats or evidence limitations. The detailed narrative findings in each section provide the full evidence base supporting these evaluative judgements.

2.6 Ethical considerations

The evaluation plan was reviewed by MSD's Research Ethics Panel. Ethical protocols were applied throughout, including informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage.

This evaluation was conducted during a period of uncertainty for providers regarding future FSC funding arrangements. The evaluation team was mindful of the potential stress and vulnerability this created for participating organisations. Processes to manage this included:

- clearly communicating that the evaluation's purpose was to understand the programme and inform future support, not to make funding decisions about individual organisations
- emphasising that participation was voluntary and would not affect current or future funding relationships with MSD
- ensuring participants could review notes and transcripts of their contributions and withdraw comments if concerned about implications

Given the small number of organisations involved, particular care was taken to avoid identifying individuals or organisations in reporting. Strategies included presenting findings thematically rather than by organisation, aggregating responses across multiple participants when discussing specific experiences, collapsing detailed interview information into composite examples that illustrated key themes without revealing specific organisational identities, removing or generalising identifying details (such as specific locations, unique programme features, or distinctive organisational characteristics) and using broad descriptors (such as "regional food rescue organisation") rather than specific names.

2.7 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this evaluation:

- The evaluation did not include direct engagement with households experiencing food insecurity. Insights into household-level outcomes were therefore based on local food provider perspectives and administrative data. While local food providers offered informed observations, the evaluation cannot capture the full diversity of household experiences, needs, or long-term outcomes.
- The provider survey achieved a 71% response rate (59 completed responses), which is a strong response rate for this type of survey. While this provided coverage across provider types and regions, the small sample size may limit the representativeness of some subgroups, particularly for smaller, rural, or specialist providers.
- Regional food hub, local food provider interview data and survey responses may be subject to social desirability or recall bias, especially when describing outcomes for households or operational challenges. This risk was heightened by the timing of the evaluation, which occurred during a period of uncertainty about future funding arrangements. Providers may have been cautious in discussing challenges or operational difficulties, or may have emphasised programme successes, knowing that

the sector's future funding was under consideration. The evaluation mitigated this through triangulation with multiple data sources, but residual bias may remain.

- Regional food hub and local food provider interviews were undertaken to provide contextualised insights into FSC operations. While the organisations and individuals were selected to capture variation in geography, provider type, scale, and population served, findings from these interviews may not fully represent all provider experiences across Aotearoa New Zealand.
- The evaluation findings describe changes associated with FSC programme support within a complex food security ecosystem. While multiple data sources were used to assess programme contribution, isolating the specific impact of FSC funding from other factors influencing outcomes presents methodological challenges. For household-level outcomes, changes in food security and wellbeing result from multiple interacting factors including other government support, informal community networks, household coping strategies, and broader economic conditions. At the system level, FSC's contributory nature means outcomes reflect the combined effect of FSC investment alongside other funding sources, organisational capabilities, and contextual factors.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation provides a robust, evidence-based assessment of the FSC programme's contribution to the food security ecosystem and the functioning of national, regional, and local infrastructure. Triangulation across qualitative and quantitative data sources supported confidence in the overall findings.

2.8 Evaluation boundaries

Beyond the methodological limitations described above, there are several matters this evaluation cannot address due to the nature of available data and the inherent complexity of the food security system:

- The evaluation cannot determine how well current FSC capacity matches either potential food supply (total surplus food available to be rescued across New Zealand) or total demand (all households experiencing food insecurity who could benefit from support). Available data shows volumes of food rescued and households supported, but not what proportion this represents of total potential supply or unmet need.
- While the evaluation demonstrates FSC reaches diverse populations, it cannot identify which households experiencing food insecurity are not accessing support or why. Understanding who remains unreached and what barriers prevent access would require household-level research beyond this evaluation's scope.
- The evaluation provides evidence of immediate and medium-term household benefits, as reported by providers and hubs, but cannot assess longer-term food security outcomes or whether support enables sustained movement out of food insecurity. This would require longitudinal household-level data collection over extended periods.
- While the evaluation demonstrates that FSC funding enables specific capabilities and outcomes, it cannot determine optimal funding levels for national, regional, or local



tiers, or how funding should be allocated across different provider types, regions, or service models to maximise impact.

These matters reflect evaluation scope boundaries and inherent system complexity rather than methodological limitations. They indicate areas where additional research, ongoing monitoring, or different methodological approaches would be required to inform future investment decisions.

3 Evaluation findings and insights

3.1 Effectiveness of investment in food distribution infrastructure and community food provision

This section addresses KEQ 1: To what extent has the investment in national, regional, and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity?

The evaluation found that:

- The FSC investment has been highly effective in building a functioning three-tiered food distribution infrastructure. Before COVID-19, organisations within the food security ecosystem tended to work independently without coordinated national, regional and local connections.
- FSC-funded infrastructure development supported a shift to an interconnected supply chain capable of moving large volumes of food and redirecting food that would otherwise be wasted.
- The investment in hard infrastructure, staffing, and capability building through AFRA and Kore Hiakai has created a more professional, coordinated sector with improved nutritional awareness, food safety standards, and culturally responsive practice.
- Provider experiences with cost reduction and product consistency varied, which is inherent to food rescue operations that depend on what surplus is available at any given time. About three-quarters of regional food hubs reported substantial cost reductions from NZFN food supply, while smaller organisations often still needed to purchase pantry staples locally. Product mix varied between periods of substantial fresh produce and dairy versus more processed foods, reflecting the unpredictable nature of surplus food availability.
- The programme has substantially strengthened the food security system's ability to respond to emergency situations. National partners, regional food hubs and local food providers supported by FSC funding played critical roles during the 2023 North Island floods and Cyclone Gabrielle, with the capacity to pivot rapidly into response mode. The investment has built institutional knowledge, established relationships with civil defence, and created supply chains that can be activated during crises.
- FSC funding plays an important role in sustaining food distribution operations. The investment has built infrastructure, capability and relationships with varying degrees of sustainability: physical assets and sector knowledge would largely persist, but maintaining system functionality depends on ongoing operational funding at all levels. The interdependent nature of the supply chain means capacity loss at any level would create gaps in operational capacity, geographic coverage, emergency response capability, and supply chain reliability.

3.1.1 Capacity and capability to source, store and distribute food as part of business as usual

Evaluation findings indicate that the investment in Food Secure Communities has directly contributed to increasing the capacity and capability of the system to source, store and distribute food, particularly rescued food.

FSC investment in NZFN built national infrastructure with capacity to rescue and distribute food at scale

Key informants, food hubs and provider interviews stated that before COVID-19 the three-tiered food distribution infrastructure did not exist, with many organisations tending to work in silos. The initial tranche of FSC funding established the New Zealand Food Network (NZFN), which operates at a national level.

Key informants noted that establishing NZFN had substantially increased the capacity of the sector to rescue surplus food, enabling management of hundreds of pallets at a time. NZFN also has the ability to redirect cancelled export orders or seasonal growing surpluses which would otherwise have been dumped by large food producers. As noted by one key informant, the establishment of NZFN had led to a steady increase in the volume of food moving through the system (see Figure 2, page 15).

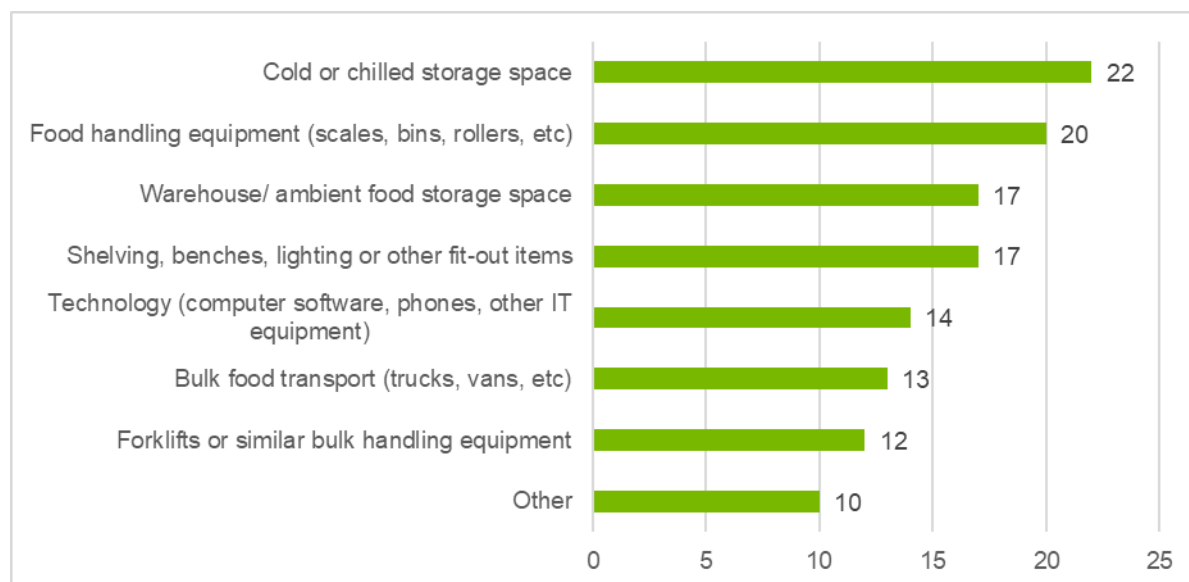
NZFN's national-level rescue capacity depends directly on regional hubs having the infrastructure to receive and redistribute these volumes. The integrated investment at both national and regional levels makes this scale possible as NZFN's rescue operations work in tandem with regional hub infrastructure to efficiently move large volumes into communities through local providers.

In addition to food rescue activities, NZFN also purchases bulk food on behalf of regional hubs and local providers, leveraging economies of scale to support the sector to access more affordable supplies of essential food items. The ability of NZFN to aggregate, unpack, repack and distribute rescued surplus food has contributed to a greater variety of food at every level of the infrastructure (i.e. national, regional and local). Food rescue hubs noted that NZFN is effectively taking advantage of seasonal oversupply in the system, rescuing surplus produce when volumes are high and making it available through the distribution network.

The investment in hard infrastructure increased system capacity at all levels to receive and manage rescued food

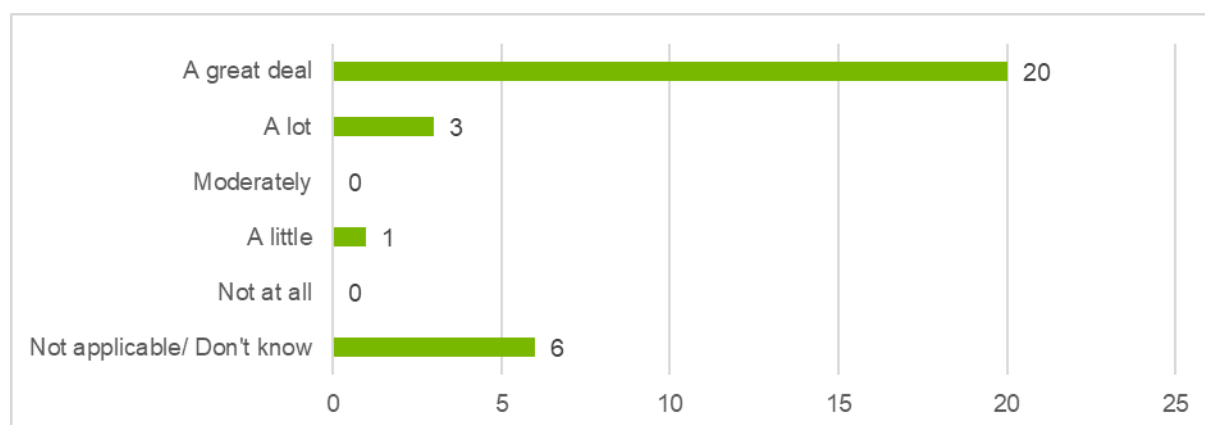
During COVID-19, the programme enabled most food rescue hubs and local food providers to invest in hard infrastructure. Of the 59 organisations responding to the survey, 31 reported purchasing capital or infrastructure items with support from FSC funding. Survey responses indicated that the programme enabled food rescue hubs and providers to invest in a range of hard infrastructure including warehousing, chillers, freezers, food transport, pallet jacks or forklifts (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Capital or infrastructure items purchased with support from FSC funding (N=59)



Survey findings (Figure 8) indicated that approximately two-thirds (20 out of 30 respondents) of regional food hubs and FSC providers experienced a substantial increase in capacity as a result of this investment. Six of those 30 who had purchased capital or infrastructure items with support from the FSC funding responded that the question wasn't applicable or that they didn't know what impact it had.

Figure 8: Impact of purchasing capital or infrastructure items (with support from FSC) on capacity to receive, store and distribute essential food supplies to community (N=30)



Interview findings reinforced the survey results, with food rescue hubs and local food providers describing the substantial increase in capacity generated through the investment in hard infrastructure.

The three-tiered system functions as an interdependent supply chain

Most food rescue hubs reported that the funding had enabled them to either purchase or rent larger warehousing space, which in some instances more than doubled in size. This additional space was required to receive and manage the larger volumes of rescued surplus food from NZFN and other sources, demonstrating how national-level food rescue operations require corresponding regional-level infrastructure investment. Without this regional capacity



expansion, NZFN would face distribution bottlenecks that limit how much food it can rescue and distribute, as food cannot be moved efficiently into communities. Similarly, regional hubs' expanded capacity only delivers value when local providers have sufficient infrastructure to receive and distribute food onward to households. The three levels therefore function as an integrated supply chain in which capacity at each level enables or constrains the effectiveness of the others.

In addition, local food providers generally described increased capacity through infrastructure investment. Two of the providers interviewed said that the investment meant that they could move to more appropriate premises (for example, from a garage to a commercial premise), supporting them to become more professional. Prior to COVID-19 many food provider operations were much smaller, and the food included in food parcels was almost exclusively limited to non-perishables. The funding meant they could store fresh produce, moving from non-perishables to including fruit, vegetables, meat and other fresh produce in food parcels. Further, without the increase in capacity almost all regional food hubs and providers noted that they would have been unable to address the increased demand from their communities for support with food during COVID-19 and continued levels of need in the community.

Through this investment the programme has directly contributed to establishing a supply chain for rescued surplus food, operating at national, regional and local levels to distribute food to where it is needed most. This included strengthening the regional hub layer of the system by establishing new food rescue infrastructure in underserved areas such as the West Coast and Northland. These new hubs have enabled rescued food to reach regions where it was not previously available, improving food providers' capacity to serve their communities in those locations.

Overall, the investment enabled organisations to receive, store and distribute larger volumes of rescued food, particularly perishables requiring refrigeration. The mechanism through which hard infrastructure created operational change was threefold: increased storage capacity meant organisations could accept larger deliveries reducing per-unit transport costs, refrigeration enabled inclusion of nutritious fresh produce that was previously unavailable; and improved connections across the three levels enabled food to flow efficiently from national organisations to regional hubs to local providers and reach households where it was needed.

FSC has increased system capacity to manage food flow and avoid waste

Supply chain operations are complex. The food distribution system operates at multiple interconnected levels. NZFN operates at a national level, receiving large volumes of food from major food producers such as Sanitarium and Fonterra, as well as supermarket distribution centres/wholesalers and producers. This national-level food rescue and bulk purchasing complements regional food rescue operations, which rescue surplus food from local supermarkets, restaurants, petrol stations, and producers. Regional food rescue hubs operate at varying scales with some operating from a single location and others with multiple branches across regions, collectively distributing rescued food to hundreds of local food providers.

In addition to receiving food from NZFN, nearly all the regional food hubs and about a third of local food providers that were interviewed reported sourcing food locally from a variety of sources, with supermarkets and local growers playing a key role. This multi-sourcing approach creates system resilience, as regional hubs are not solely dependent on national supply. At a

local level, donations from local growers can lead to excess supply that cannot be absorbed locally. Rather than creating waste, the three-tiered model enables this surplus to move upward through the system. Local providers share excess with their regional hub, which can redistribute to other local providers or coordinate with NZFN for distribution elsewhere in the country. This bidirectional flow demonstrates how the three tiers work together as an integrated system rather than a top-down distribution chain.

Three-tiered coordination in Tairāwhiti

The Tairāwhiti region demonstrates how the three-tiered model operates in practice, with coordination mechanisms enabling both business-as-usual operations and emergency response.

During business-as-usual periods, NZFN delivers food to a regional food rescue hub that serves as a distribution centre for 17 recipient groups across the region. The hub receives, sorts, and redistributes food to local providers including foodbanks and community organisations. Local providers also source food independently from local growers, sometimes receiving volumes their community cannot absorb. For example, one provider received 40 bins of produce at once and coordinated with the regional hub and NZFN to redistribute the excess to other regions, demonstrating bidirectional food flows.

There is some variation within the region; one area without NZFN access operates using locally donated and purchased food, showing how the model adapts to different contexts while maintaining overall regional coordination.

During the 2023 severe weather events, this coordination infrastructure enabled rapid emergency response. Road closures meant food could not leave the district, so the regional hub collected food from pack houses that would otherwise be trapped and wasted. The hub stored this food until access reopened, then distributed it to community groups who could reach households in need. Local providers scaled up operations, with one establishing a 24-hour community hub serving as an emergency food parcel distribution point and community kitchen drop-off location. NZFN supplied emergency food stocks through the regional hub, which managed logistics and distribution across affected areas. The established relationships, storage infrastructure, and coordination mechanisms meant the region could pivot rapidly from business-as-usual to emergency operations without needing to build new systems.

Interviewees in this region emphasised the importance of FSC funding creating national-level infrastructure that regional and local organisations can then connect into, with each tier needing to be adequately resourced for the system to function.

Maintaining capacity requires ongoing investment

While the FSC funding provided and initial boost through hard infrastructure, maintaining this capacity requires ongoing resources. A small number of regional food hubs and providers reported that equipment that had been purchased through the programme either had stopped working due to normal wear and tear or been damaged (for example, in flooding) making it no longer usable. While two of regional food hubs and one provider that were interviewed stated that they had received local donations and philanthropic funding that enabled them to replace or upgrade equipment, this opportunity was not uniform. When hard infrastructure ceases to function, some food providers do not have access to the necessary resources or additional investment to replace these items.

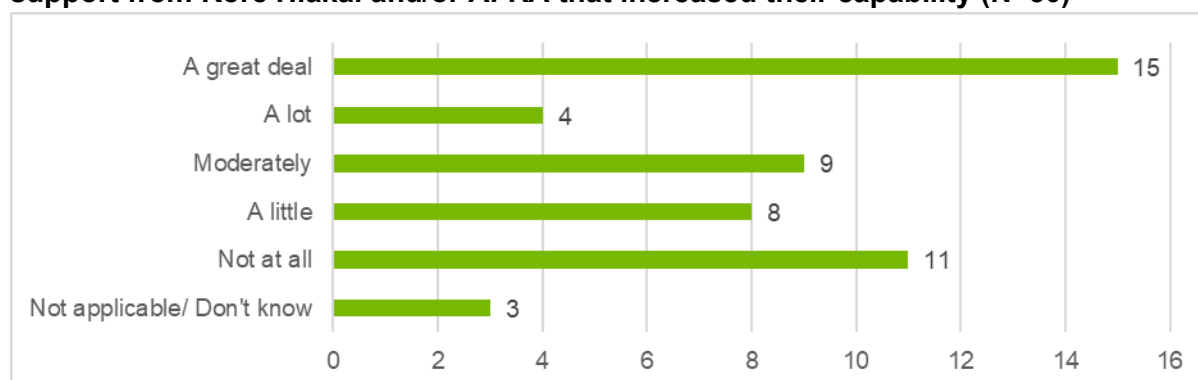
Although the programme has contributed to an increase in capacity, practical limits remain. NZFN reported that storage and refrigeration capacity constraints occasionally prevent them from accepting large volumes of perishable surplus food, resulting in some missed opportunities to rescue food that would otherwise go to waste.

Similarly, two regional food hubs reported that at peak times, such as periods of seasonal oversupply of fruit and vegetables, they are occasionally unable to accept more food due to insufficient storage space or inadequate staffing to manage distribution, even though household demand exists. These national-level capacity constraints often reflect downstream bottlenecks rather than NZFN's infrastructure limitations. If regional hubs lack capacity to receive food from NZFN, or local providers cannot accept food from regional hubs, the backup in the system prevents NZFN from rescuing additional food. This demonstrates how the three-tiered model functions as an interconnected system - capacity constraints at any level reduce the effectiveness of the entire supply chain.

The work of AFRA and Kore Hiakai has contributed to improved sector capability

The evaluation found that across the sector there has been a general capability uplift through the work of AFRA and Kore Hiakai. Survey findings (Figure 9) show that 28 of 50 survey respondents (56%) reported that regional food hubs and local food providers found Kore Hiakai Zero and/or AFRA had provided resources, training or support that had increased their capability.

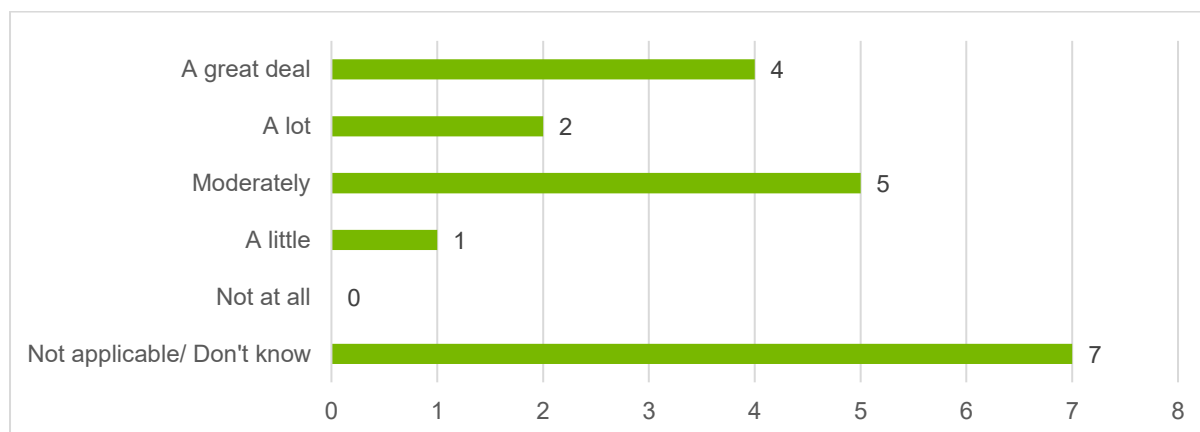
Figure 9: Number of survey respondents that reported receiving resources, training or support from Kore Hiakai and/or AFRA that increased their capability (N=50)



However, 19 of 50 respondents did not report capability increases from AFRA or Kore Hiakai. Interview findings indicated this was because some providers accessed capability-building through alternative channels, faced operational differences that made engagement difficult (such as different distribution models or rural vs urban contexts), or lacked capacity to engage meaningfully with sector initiatives while prioritising service delivery to their communities.

In relation to the capability building contribution of AFRA, 58% of providers (11 of 19 respondents) reported that AFRA had increased providers ability to provide food supplies to their community (Figure 10). Seven of the 19 responses indicated that this was not applicable to them or they did not know. Interview evidence suggests that these organisations were not heavily involved in food rescue, making AFRA's resources less relevant.

Figure 10: Extent to which the work of AFRA increased providers’ ability to provide food supplies to their community (N=19)



Membership of AFRA is valued by regional food hubs that were involved in rescuing surplus food. Feedback from key informants, regional food hubs and local food providers who were members of AFRA indicated that establishing AFRA had led to a general uplift in capability and supported the food rescue sector to mature. AFRA’s role was described as supporting information sharing, promoting best practice and increasing the ability of smaller or less mature organisations to function well through providing collegial support and guidance that members can access as required. The development of many resources has been collaborative, with regional food hubs and local food providers supporting their development. In addition, some well-established regional food hubs provided AFRA with resources they had already produced in response to requests from organisations for information about rescuing surplus food pre-COVID-19. The resources that have been developed include guidance on food handling, food safety, fundraising and more recently a Second Harvest manual.³ Most key informants, regional food hubs and local food providers stated that the provision of guidance relating to food handling and food safety has supported their ability to negotiate with supermarkets to rescue surplus food. In part, this is enabled by being able to reassure the supermarket that they have the necessary capability and capacity to ensure food handling standards will be maintained.

Amongst organisations involved in rescuing surplus food, AFRA has played an important role in promoting and supporting the building of relationships and working collaboratively. Nearly all AFRA members that were interviewed credited the organisation with being a “good connector”, helping establish a network of food rescue hubs through which relationships were built and collaboration occurred. Mechanisms that have supported this collaboration include annual conferences at national and regional levels, as well as connecting organisations where it could be beneficial. For example, AFRA has helped connect regional food hubs or local food providers seeking to establish a community kitchen with those that have relevant experience.

³ Second Harvest connects surplus produce from farms, orchards, and gardens with communities who need it. It could involve harvesting directly from the land, growers setting aside excess to be collected, or dropping it off at local food rescue groups. Sometimes, second Harvest is also called gleaning which involves farmers allowing volunteers to pick the left-over fruit and vegetables that were not picked in the initial harvest. The guidance is designed to provide both farmers and food rescue organisations with the necessary information to safely glean.



Through such collaboration, visits can be arranged and time and energy saved through benefitting from each other's experience.

However, a small number of regional food hubs and providers described the relationships that had been built through AFRA's initiatives as more transactional. A small number of providers noted challenges in engaging closely with AFRA's initiatives, citing operational differences that made collaboration difficult. These included different distribution models (such as foodbank parcels compared to choice-based approaches) and contexts (dispersed rural communities compared to urban settings). However, this was not a widely reported concern. Further, three of the regional food hubs and local food providers that were interviewed stated that due to capacity constraints they were unable to engage meaningfully with AFRA. They shared that their priority was serving their communities and that to continue deriving the benefits from AFRA's work it was important to ensure the supply chain was able to continue operating as it should.

While AFRA provides capacity-building resources on food safety and handling, not all local food providers were accessing this support. The increased volumes of fresh produce through the FSC programme created heightened need for food safety and handling skills, but some providers - particularly those not involved in food rescue - were not engaging with AFRA's publicly available resources and training, as AFRA's work is designed for food rescue organisations. These providers accessed capability-building support through alternative channels, including Te Whatu Ora partnerships and local food provider collaborations. Some providers established local collectives to share knowledge and FSC-funded resources such as refrigeration equipment. While these alternative pathways demonstrated provider resourcefulness, the gap suggests opportunities to strengthen connections between AFRA's capacity-building offering and local providers' needs.

In addition to the work conducted by AFRA, Kore Hiakai has lifted capability in a range of areas including the ability of regional food hubs and local food providers to understand and incorporate cultural values, upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and providing culturally appropriate food.

Kore Hiakai convenes hui and other forums for sector collaboration and knowledge sharing, providing research insights that inform food provision practice. Local food providers valued Kore Hiakai's role in convening hui and sharing research-based information across the sector. One provider described how the research-based thinking shared through these forums was both inspiring and practical, providing a foundation that underpinned and scaffolded their everyday work. Providers reported that Kore Hiakai's research validated their lived experience of food insecurity drivers and provided evidence for what they were seeing on the ground, strengthening their practice and advocacy efforts

Kore Hiakai was seen as playing an important role in informing food rescue hubs and providers' approach to nutritional value in food parcels. A key mechanism to support this was the introduction of the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure (ASFPM), a calculating tool that quantifies the volume of kai assistance provided through food parcels. The ASFPM offers a consistent way for community food providers and distributors to standardise food parcel compilation with balanced, nutritious foods. A food parcel compiled using the measure accounts for four people, three meals a day, for four days, and is compiled at 80% of the



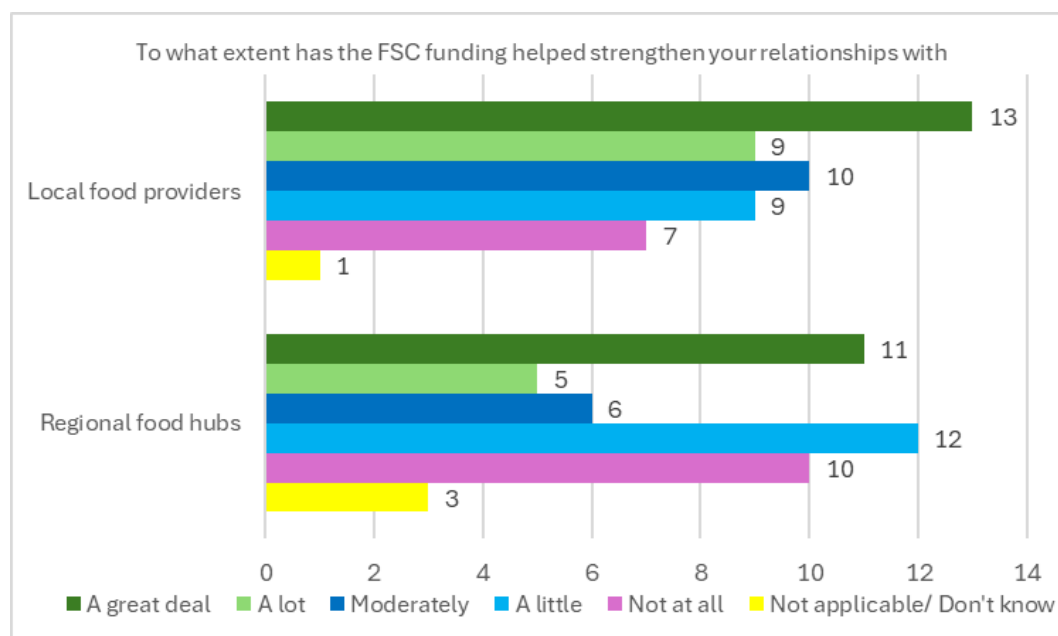
nutritional guide. Almost all the regional food hubs and local food providers stated that the introduction of the standard food parcel had improved their awareness of the importance of the nutritional value of food parcels. This had translated into their food parcel composition process, leading to households experiencing food insecurity receiving more nutritionally balanced food parcels. In addition, increased awareness of the importance of nutrition had led some regional food hubs to actively procure and seek donations of fresh produce, protein sources, and minimally processed foods.

Together, the work of AFRA and Kore Hiakai was considered to play an important role for the community food sector. This included lifting the sectors’ profile across the country and helping build understanding of what food rescue is, and its value and benefits to society. The majority of regional food hubs and local food providers that were interviewed reported that AFRA supported a collective sector voice on food insecurity issues. This contributed to maintaining and increasing the food available through the community food distribution system. Raised awareness of food rescue also contributed to improved community recognition of local food providers, with several of the providers that were interviewed reporting that households could more easily identify where to access food relief alongside social, emotional and mental health support.

Improved relationships and collaboration at the local and regional level

In addition to the capacity and capability building, the survey asked to what extent the FSC funding helped respondents strengthen their relationships with their local food providers and regional food hubs. 32 of 49 (65%) reported stronger local relationships and 22 of 47 responding to the survey (47%) reported stronger regional relationships with help from FSC funding (Figure 11). For those that did not indicate strengthened relationships, interview data suggests this is due to strong pre-existing networks, geographic isolation limiting networking opportunities, and capacity constraints preventing engagement in relationship-building activities.

Figure 11: Impact of FSC funding on local and/or regional relationships (N=49 local food providers; N=47 regional food hubs)





The hubs and providers that reported stronger relationships described how these made operations easier. Most of the regional hubs that were interviewed reported sharing contacts for food sourcing, supplier partnerships, and businesses willing to donate. For example, in North Canterbury, the funding supported establishment of Food Secure North Canterbury (FSNC). A regional hub in this area described how improved trust and relationships had strengthened food distribution, with hubs trading and swapping resources to keep services operating when providers were running low on supplies. Most interviewees considered the emphasis on collaboration in keeping with the 'spirit' of regional food hubs.

Another hub gave a practical example of regional-level collaboration, stating that when planning to establish a kitchen, they were able to identify and visit organisations already operating kitchens. This enabled them to share learnings rather than starting from scratch, saving time and energy.

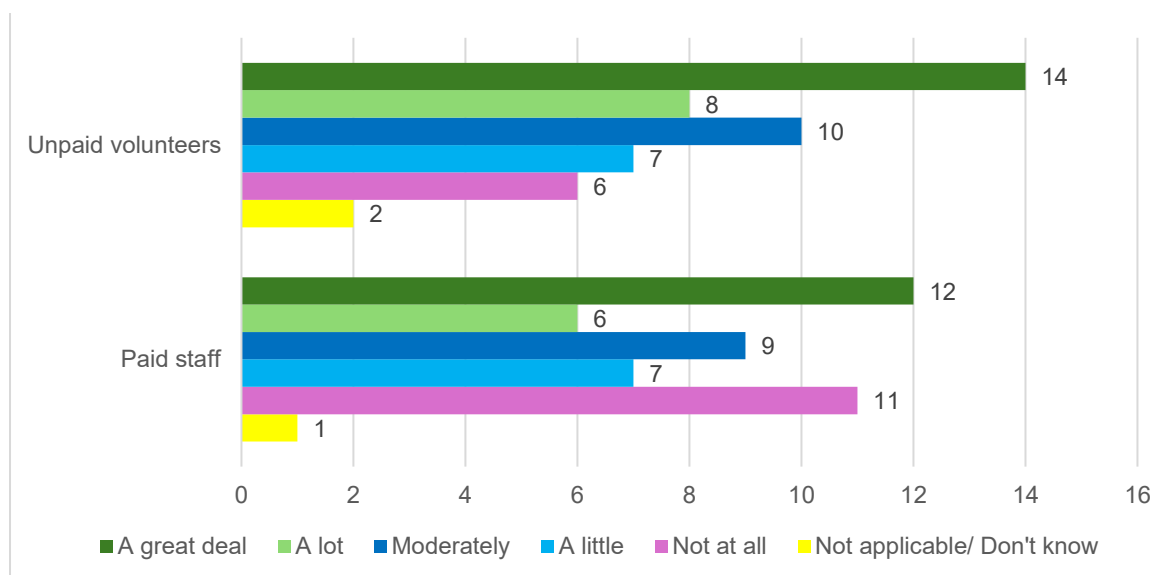
At the provider level, relationships enabled the local food distribution community to share resources when supply and demand were mismatched. A Tairāwhiti provider described receiving a large volume of fresh produce from a local grower, which their organisation could not absorb before spoilage. Through relationships with other providers and their regional hub, the organisation was able to distribute food throughout the community.

Some providers established or strengthened local collectives through FSC funding. These collaborations involved sharing FSC-purchased resources such as refrigeration equipment between community organisations, enabling the wider community to take advantage of food rescue opportunities. These local networks sometimes extended beyond food provision to include Police, family violence services, and broader health and social services.

The FSC funding has increased capacity and capability through supporting the recruitment of staff and volunteers

FSC funding enabled organisations to build operational capacity through both paid staff and volunteer engagement. Figure 12 shows 27 of 47 survey respondents (67%) reported that the FSC funding enabled their organisation to engage more volunteers moderately, a lot, or to a great deal, compared to 13 respondents who reported engaging more unpaid volunteers a little or not at all. Thirty-two of 46 survey respondents (70%) reported that the FSC funding enabled their organisation to engage more paid staff moderately to a great deal of the time compared to 18 respondents who reported doing a little or not at all.

Figure 12: Extent to which FSC funding enabled ability to engage staff and volunteers (N=47 unpaid volunteers; N=46 paid staff)



Interview findings reinforced the survey results. Most regional food hubs and local food providers reported that increasing their capacity included recruiting additional paid staff and volunteers. In some instances, this involved a shift from a pure volunteer model to employing one or two paid staff, often on a part-time basis. Most regional food hubs emphasised the importance of having paid staff as part of generating a level of consistency in their operations, especially for tasks such as driving. While some regional food hubs had regular volunteers, usually retirees, others reported having a high turnover with volunteers moving onto paid employment making it difficult to rely on this workforce for delivery of critical tasks on an ongoing basis. In addition, the capacity boost through FSC funding enabled some organisations to recruit people with specific skills to enhance their capability in areas such as operations, nutrition and/or cooking. Additional staff and volunteers were credited with improving the professionalism of these organisations and enabling new activities. These included teaching households how to use unfamiliar foods through to an increased ability to upcycle⁴ surplus produce into products with a longer shelf life. A regional food hub noted that they now had staff with the right skills and training to match incoming food with the needs of different recipient organisations, which ensured rescued surplus food reaches the places it can best serve communities.

3.1.2 Improved capacity and capability to support emergency response efforts

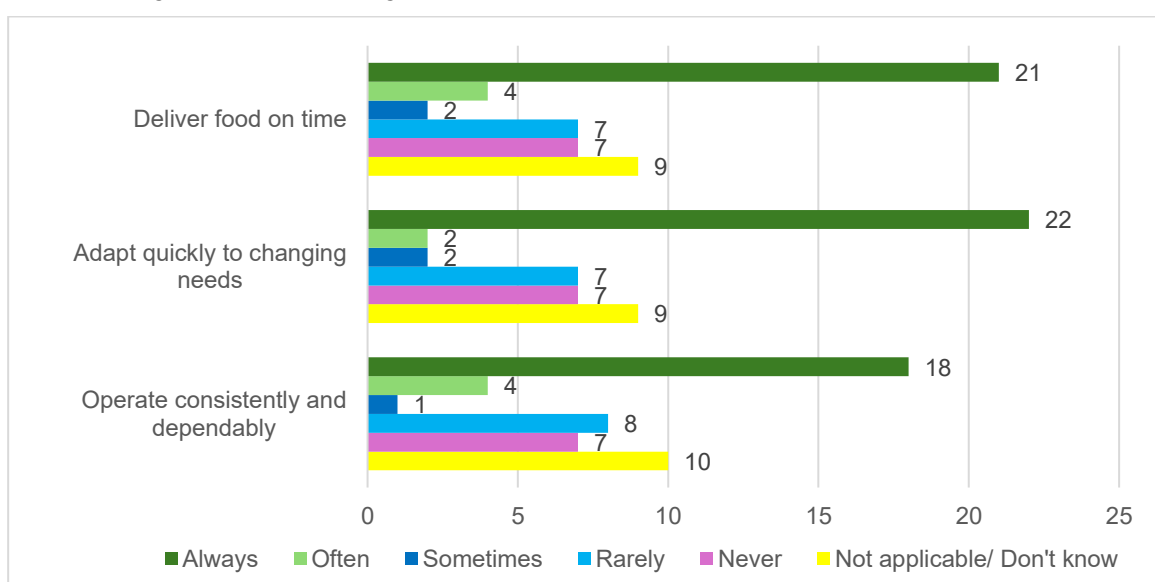
The evaluation found that the investment in capacity and capability has strengthened supply chain infrastructure, enhancing its ability to rapidly respond in an emergency, contributing to community resilience.

⁴ Upcycling refers to the process of converting food with a short life into a product that has a longer more stable life, such as making tomatoes into pasta sauce.

Investment has contributed to increased capacity in the system to respond to emergencies

All survey respondents were asked about FSC funding's support during emergencies in the last three years. For organisations that experienced emergencies during this period (excluding those who responded 'not applicable' or 'don't know', which generally indicates they did not face an emergency beyond COVID-19), survey findings (Figure 13) show FSC funding supported the majority to deliver food on time (27 of 41 respondents; 66%); adapt quickly to changing needs (26 of 40 respondents; 65%); operate consistently and dependably (23 of 38 respondents, 61%).

Figure 13: Extent to which FSC funding has supported increase in capacity to delivery during emergencies (N=50 Deliver food on time; N=49 Adapt quickly; N=48 Operate consistently and dependably)



National partners, regional food hubs and local food providers need sufficient capacity and capability to be able to effectively contribute to an emergency response. As shown in Figure 13, approximately one-third to two-fifths of survey respondents who had experienced emergencies reported little or no FSC support for emergency response capacity. Interview data indicated that organisations' experiences varied based on their pre-existing infrastructure and funding sources. Some well-established organisations, particularly those in areas such as Canterbury, had already developed emergency capacity during earlier events. This included infrastructure developed through philanthropic funding and council support after the Canterbury earthquakes. For these organisations, FSC funding supported business-as-usual operations that could scale up during emergencies, rather than specifically building emergency response capability.

In contrast, organisations that were newer or had scaled up significantly during COVID-19 and/or the 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events attributed their emergency response capacity directly to FSC-funded infrastructure and staffing. More broadly, there was consensus amongst regional food hubs and local food providers who had been involved in an emergency since COVID-19 that the capacity and capability sustained through FSC funding had made it easy to pivot into response and recovery mode during a community-wide emergency.



The national and regional logistics infrastructure established during COVID-19 through FSC funding created solid supply chains that could be activated during emergencies. This infrastructure included NZFN's national distribution model and expanded regional hub operations, providing the capacity needed for emergency food response.

Interviewees noted that FSC-funded infrastructure, including transport (chiller vans, trucks), storage (chillers, freezers, warehouse space), and paid staff, combined with established relationships across the supply chain, gave them the necessary capacity to respond rapidly when emergencies disrupted food production and distribution. The equipment, staffing, and coordination networks enabled organisations to rapidly surge their capacity and respond in a timely manner. The efforts of these organisations had not only included delivering food to households needing support but also rescuing food that would otherwise have been wasted due to road closures and the loss of ability to distribute the food to other parts of New Zealand.

Experiences in emergency responses had led in some instances to further investment in capacity to ensure they were prepared for any future emergencies. Examples of these types of investment included obtaining generators to enable hubs and providers to continue to store and distribute food safely if electricity supplies were damaged and purchasing containers for chilling and freezing goods that could be moved to another location enabling them to fit in better with any emergency planning.

Regional food hubs that were geographically relatively close to locations that had recently experienced emergencies also noted that the FSC-supported increase in capacity meant that they were more able to support response and recovery efforts. Key informants, regional food hubs and local food providers explained that they would not have been able to scale up and address the demand for food from households without receiving the funding, as they would not have had the necessary capacity.

National partners, regional food hubs and local food providers have the necessary capability to meaningfully support emergency response efforts

The investment through FSC funding has enabled regional food hubs and local food providers to develop skills and knowledge that support a rapid response to emergencies. Regional food hubs explained that the need to be responsive and agile in an emergency was in keeping with how they operated due to the nature of rescuing surplus food, which required them to respond to changes on a daily basis. This operational adaptability, combined with established community relationships and local knowledge, positioned them well for emergency response.

Emergency responses have included providing emergency food parcels and cooked meals to households impacted by the emergency. As one key informant noted, in the case of Cyclone Gabrielle, NZFN, regional food hubs and local food providers on the East Coast responded to community needs within a day. Further, some key informants stated that government departments now have a broad network of organisations they can partner with during emergencies, with each hub or local food provider serving as a single point of contact to gather information about community needs and to distribute resources. Regional food hubs and local food providers were well-positioned for emergency response due to their established community relationships and local knowledge. Communities would often approach them directly for help, and staff and volunteers had the necessary knowledge to match appropriate food to specific household needs.

Experience in contributing to community-wide emergencies, such as the Auckland floods and Cyclone Gabrielle, meant these organisations built institutional knowledge about what was involved in an emergency response. This included how they should set themselves up to provide effective logistical support, with civil defence teams delegating to them the responsibility of getting food and other essential items into the community when needed.

Almost all regional food hubs and local food providers that had been involved had built important relationships with local civil defence teams, commenting that they were now ‘in the tent’. Some regional food hubs and local food providers were now part of the emergency preparedness system, attending civil defence meetings as part of preparing for future emergencies. A small number of regional food hubs and local food providers had invested in developing emergency preparedness plans, such as business continuity supply plans. Others had purchased and stored equipment and emergency food stocks which could then be drawn on if needed. These efforts, along with increased institutional knowledge and improved relationships with civil defence, contributes to improved community resilience.

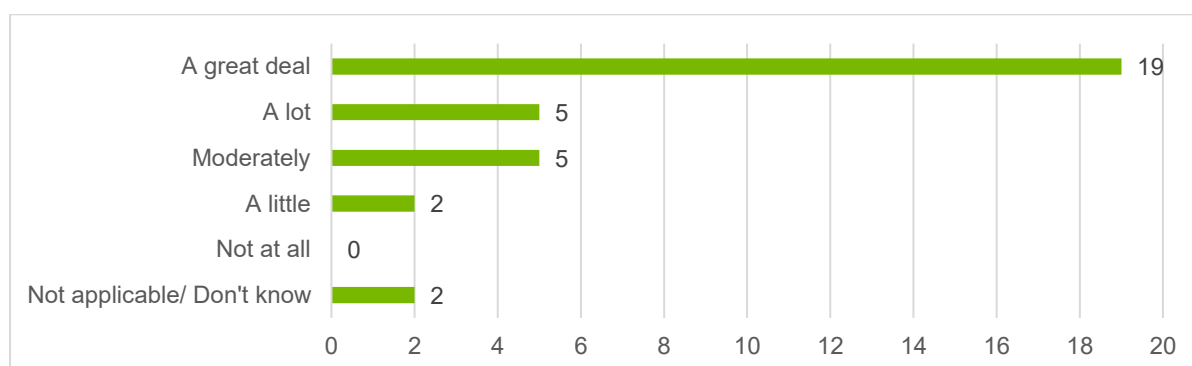
3.1.3 Improvements in the sourcing and providing access to food

Food volumes and provider capacity to supply have increased substantially

As indicated in section 1.3, combined provider administrative data shows that food volumes, especially through rescuing surplus food has continued to grow from 7.4 million kilograms in 2023/2024 to 10.4 million kilograms in 2024/2025.

In addition, survey findings (Figure 14) show nearly all food providers supported by food rescue organisations or regional food hubs (31 of 33 respondents) reported an increased ability to provide food supplies to their community, with most (19 respondents) reporting it increased their ability to provide food supplies a great deal.

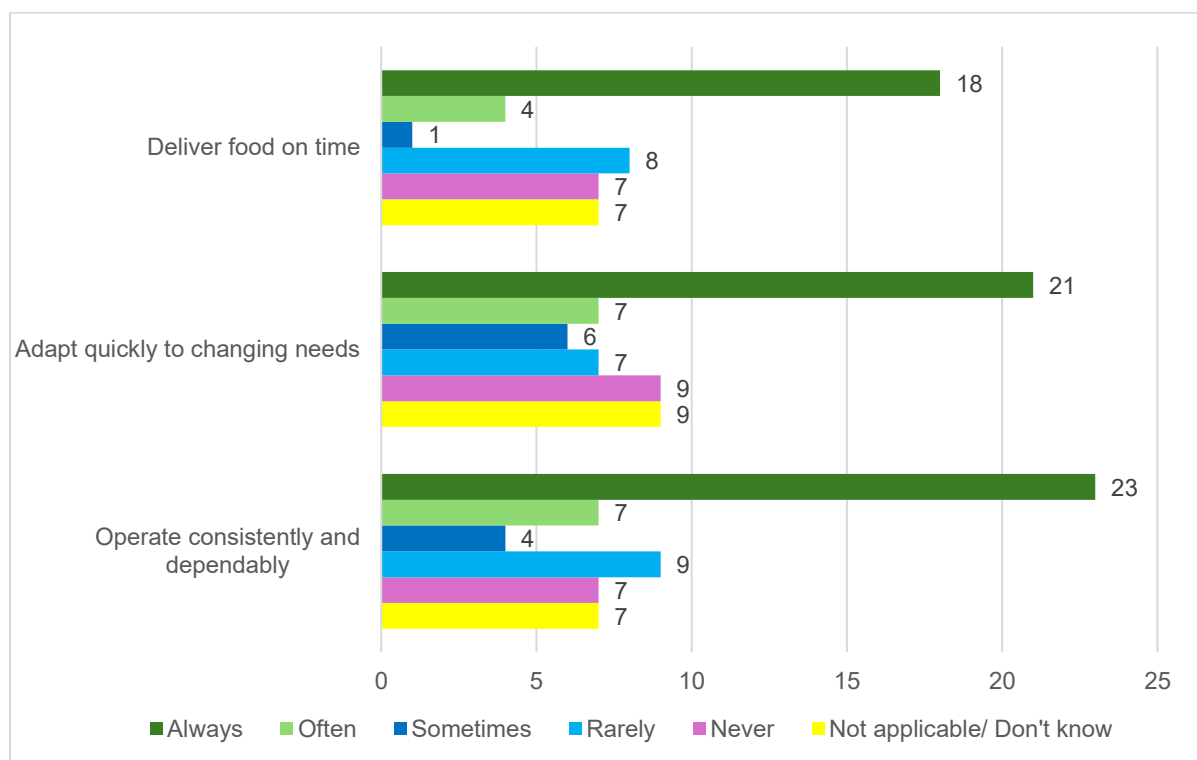
Figure 14: Extent to which food rescue organisations or regional food hubs have increased ability to provide food supplies to communities (N=33)



The capacity and capability built through FSC funding strengthened not only emergency response but also routine operations. Reliable, responsive food distribution during business-as-usual periods is essential for maintaining trust with communities and ensuring households can access food support consistently. Excluding respondents who responded NA/Don't know, the survey results found that 23 of 38 survey respondents (61%) reported that the FSC funding enabled them to deliver food on time sometimes, often or always, 34 of 50 respondents (68%)

that FSC funding enabled them to adapt quickly to changing needs sometimes or more, and 34 of 50 respondents (68%) that the FSC funding supported them to operate consistently and dependably (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Extent to which FSC funding supported business-as-usual operational capacity (N=45 Food on time; N=59 Adapt quickly; N=57 Operate consistently and dependably)



Approximately one third of respondents did not report improvements in operational capacity. Interview findings suggest this is mostly in organisations in which FSC funding represents too small a proportion of budgets to impact operations.

Expanded food rescue has improved access to nutritious food

Regional food hubs and local food providers reported that improvements in food supply through NZFN and expanded regional food rescue has increased access to nutritious food. Local food providers explained that without rescued surplus food in the system they would be unable to include meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, eggs and dairy in food parcels. The improvement in nutritional quality of food parcels was described as substantial compared to what had been historically provided, with a far more nutritious mix of foods. For providers engaged with AFRA and Kore Hiakai, these improvements were further supported by capacity building around safe handling of fresh produce and increased awareness of the importance of nutritional content in food parcels (as discussed in section 3.1.2).

These improvements reflect the three-tiered infrastructure working effectively: NZFN's national-level relationships with large food producers secure diverse, nutritious food at scale; regional hubs' expanded infrastructure enables safe handling and storage of perishables; and local providers' increased capacity allows them to include these fresh items in food parcels



that reach households. This nutritional improvement would likely not be achievable through investment at only one level of the system.

NZFN has become a substantial food supplier, though experiences with product consistency vary

Regional food hubs noted that NZFN was able to both rescue and supply larger volumes of surplus food than had been possible before. NZFN was viewed as a substantial supplier of food, providing weekly deliveries to the regional food hubs they served. Estimations of the proportion of food sourced from NZFN varied, with estimations of the volume of food NZFN provided ranging from approximately 50% for some regional food hubs, through to 16-20% and occasionally as little as 5% for a small number of providers. This variation reflected factors including geographic location and distribution logistics (with greater distance from NZFN distribution points increasing transport costs and reducing delivery frequency, particularly affecting South Island and remote providers), the strength of local food rescue relationships (with some regions having substantial local donor networks), and organisation size affecting capacity to receive and store large NZFN deliveries.

Almost all regional food hubs interviewed welcomed the food supplied by NZFN, though they noted some variability in product types and nutritional quality, reflecting the unpredictable nature of food rescue which depends on what surplus is available at any given time. About half of the regional food hubs and local food providers interviewed experienced NZFN as very responsive, making efforts to source products when requested. NZFN was an important food source for regions without large food companies, helping diversify food options for households. These regional food hubs also valued NZFN as a source of other essential items such as nappies, toilet paper, packaging food parcels and pet food.

However, a small number of the hubs noted that the composition of NZFN deliveries fluctuated over time. During some periods, deliveries included substantial fresh produce, meat and dairy, which were highly valued for their nutritional contribution to food parcels. During other periods, deliveries consisted primarily of processed foods and items with high sugar content, which added less nutritional value. Some hubs also noted receiving large quantities of the same items in single deliveries, with the unpredictable nature of rescue making it difficult to plan. Several hubs suggested that certain products were better suited for community kitchens that could prepare meals at scale and had storage capacity, highlighting opportunities for strategic distribution based on recipient organisational capacity.

Another challenge in the supply chain was occasional issues with food flow between system levels. As one regional food hub noted they sometimes needed to store supplies from NZFN for extended periods, distributing food and items gradually to local food providers, as the latter had insufficient storage space to manage the volumes involved. Local food providers also sometimes experienced difficulties in distributing some food if it did not align well with what their community normally ate.

Local food sources complement the national distribution system

In addition to the food provided by NZFN, all regional food hubs and some local food providers had additional local sources of food. Regional food hubs explained that accessing local sources of food involved developing good working relationships with local supermarkets and



other businesses and demonstrating reliability. It could also involve educating supermarkets and other businesses as to why rescuing surplus food was important to secure commitment to participating. Local supermarkets were highly valued as they provided a regular supply of food including meat, fresh produce and staple items. Excess supplies of local produce were shared with other regional food hubs and broader community initiatives designed to address food insecurity such as community kitchens and pay-what-you-can dining services.

A small number of key informant interviewees and regional food hubs noted that centralising relationships with large food producers through NZFN changed regional food hubs' direct access to food producers. These hubs explained that historically they had received significant food donations directly from these producers due to geographic proximity or established relationships. When these producers began donating through NZFN's centralised system instead, the food was distributed more equitably across regions, meaning hubs that previously had privileged access received smaller volumes. While this reduced supply for individual hubs that had benefited from direct relationships, these same hubs acknowledged the centralised model was fairer overall, providing more equitable access to food from large food producers across the country, particularly benefiting regions that had previously struggled to access these products.

Regional food hub and local food provider views on the difference NZFN had made to costs varied

Several key informants commented that one of the advantages of establishing NZFN was that it was able to negotiate cheaper food due to its ability to bulk purchase. They noted that some local food providers who purchased their own food found it more expensive than bulk purchases, and many small- to medium-sized organisations do not have the capacity to negotiate cost effective deals.

However, feedback from regional food hubs that were interviewed on the difference NZFN has made to the cost of food parcels was mixed. About three quarters of regional food hubs that were interviewed reported that receiving food from NZFN had substantially reduced the cost of food parcels, by providing products that could replace items previously purchased locally. In addition, some regional food hubs chose to purchase specific items, such as chicken or nappies, from NZFN as it was cheaper than local options.

However, the other quarter of regional food hubs interviewed (primarily small to medium-sized organisations) stated that access to NZFN food had not substantially reduced the cost of parcels. While rescued food provided valuable fresh produce, meat and dairy, basic pantry staples were not consistently available through food rescue and still required purchase. As these staples form a significant portion of food parcel volume and are essential for creating complete, usable parcels, the costs of purchasing these items limited the overall cost reduction. Many of these hubs preferred to purchase the required goods locally, as the food could be ordered and delivered within a couple of days, giving the regional food hub greater consistency in delivery. While NZFN also offers bulk purchasing services where hubs can specify required items, some hubs preferred local purchasing relationships for their reliability and speed.

As some larger regional food hubs have grown through FSC support, they have developed capacity to diversify their supply chains. Two large hubs described how their scale now



enabled them to negotiate bulk purchasing arrangements with local suppliers alongside their NZFN supply. One hub explained they were now large enough to provide suppliers with consistency of demand, which motivated suppliers to provide food and essential items quickly. This diversified supply model created efficiencies for these hubs while potentially freeing NZFN capacity to focus on regions and smaller hubs with more limited local purchasing power.

3.1.4 Alignment between community food provision and gaps in community food security needs

Outcomes-focused funding has enabled each region to adjust their approach in response to local community needs

The FSC funding model enabled each region to do things slightly differently in response to the needs of their community. Key informants noted that local community providers understood the needs of their communities and the types of initiatives that could respond well to specific situations occurring in their communities. Community providers were seen as holding granular information at a local level that it was not possible for national organisations to have. This granular knowledge was built through local food providers building relationships with family and whānau, listening to and being responsive to family and whānau voice. This meant that they had insights into who needed support and how to provide holistic support that effectively met that need. The consensus across local food providers was that the critical gap they were filling was reaching food-insecure households and communities not served by other support mechanisms. This included filling the gap left by school lunch programmes during school holidays when these meals were not available, developing affordable food access options such as pop-up produce stalls and social supermarkets, and creating community cafes that provide meals while reducing stigma and building social connections. Some regional food hubs and local food providers also reported that the knowledge gained through the work of AFRA and Kore Hiakai had led to changes in practice to place more emphasis on maintaining the mana and dignity of households experiencing food insecurity. This was achieved through providing more choice over the food they received, making their environment more welcoming such as providing hospitality, and seeking to reduce the shame associated with seeking food support.

FSC funding has strengthened providers' ability to assess client needs and refer to complementary support services

Some local food providers operated using food as a 'front door' to address broader household needs and avoid long-term dependency on food support. Regional food hubs, given their intermediary role in the supply chain and more limited direct household contact, were less frequently involved in this wraparound approach compared to local providers. Among local food providers using this approach, two main service models were used. Some providers offered both food and wraparound services in-house, making internal referrals across their own service portfolio. These providers explained that food support often provided the initial connection with households who might be reluctant to seek help for other issues. From this starting point, some providers worked with households to engage with budgeting and other services after the first food parcel, while others built trust gradually over multiple visits before making internal referrals to address underlying issues such as debt management or income support eligibility.

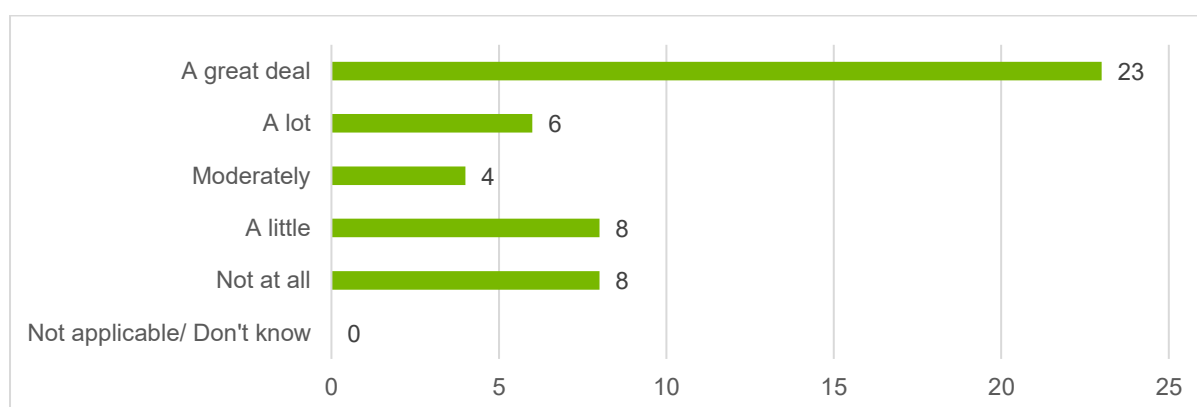
Other providers focused on food provision while partnering with agencies delivering wraparound services. These providers received referrals from diverse sources including government departments (Corrections, Oranga Tamariki, Police family harm teams), MSD, community support workers, iwi health and social providers, Māori Women's Welfare League, disability support services, mental health services and Plunket. Providers supplied food parcels to referring agencies, who then delivered them alongside their own support services. Providers reported that feedback from referring agencies indicated food provision was beneficial for meeting immediate needs, building trust, and enabling work on more complex issues. In rural communities particularly, this partnership model enabled reach to households who would be reluctant to seek food support directly.

FSC investment has supported providers to develop innovative, locally relevant solutions

When providers have both strong connections in their communities and the capacity to respond, they can develop locally relevant solutions to food insecurity both during business-as-usual operations and emergencies (as discussed in section 3.1.2). Evaluation findings indicate that FSC funding has enabled most regional food hubs and local food providers to creatively respond to the unique food security needs of their communities (Figure 16). Nearly half of providers (23 of 49 respondents) reported that FSC funding has allowed them to respond to their community's unique needs 'a great deal', with another six reporting 'a lot'.

However, 16 of the 49 survey respondents felt the funding had allowed them to respond to their community's unique needs 'a little' or 'not at all'. The interview data and open text survey responses did not provide detailed information to explain this finding, three providers stated that they were already delivering tailored approaches before the FSC investment, and four others said that capacity constraints limited their ability to innovate. Additionally, access to Food Security Initiatives funding, which specifically supported innovation, was not universal across all providers given the limited funding pool available for these initiatives.

Figure 16: Extent to which FSC funding allowed creative responses to the unique food security needs of community (N=49)



FSC has enabled regional food hubs and local food providers to invest in pilot programmes informed by their communities, with some of these investments leading to scaled-up innovative approaches to food security delivery. This represents a shift from a focus on outputs (distributing food parcels) to outcomes (strengthening longer-term food security). The



investment has freed up resources to support initiatives that address food security sustainably rather than simply providing relief from food insecurity.

In addition to providing food parcels or access to a social supermarket, many regional food hubs and local food providers sought to address needs in the community through a variety of other initiatives. In doing this, there was a strong desire to complement and build on other services, and to avoid replicating other services. For example, if there were already established initiatives such as community gardens or a youth programme that included learning to grow vegetables, local food providers would not set up something similar. Rather, they invested their time and energy in filling other critical gaps in their community. This contributes to a more efficient system through reducing the risk of duplication of effort and investment.

Providers have developed various alternative models for food access

Providers developed various alternative models for food access that move beyond traditional food parcel distribution. Social supermarkets allow people to shop as they would in a regular supermarket, choosing food rather than receiving a pre-packed box which may include items they might not use. One provider is developing a social supermarket model specifically for clients engaged with budgeting services, working with wholesalers that are prepared to sell food at cost. This represents another tool to support households toward food security, though implementation requires navigating health and safety requirements and organisational approvals.

Some approaches were designed to make accessing food for people struggling financially more sustainable through the provision of more affordable foods, resulting in less dependency on community food provision. Regional food hubs and local food providers explained that the Food Security Initiatives funding had enabled them to explore and develop these innovations. This included establishing weekly pop-up stalls at venues such as community centres or small markets at which people could access food at a low cost. This food was typically sourced directly from growers, making it possible to sell food at a lower cost. In some instances, additional discounts were given to those with a community services card or a green prescription card.

Community cafes provide hot meals to people who may be homeless, for people waiting to access a food parcel or social supermarket, or for anyone else who needed a hot meal. These cafes often worked on a koha basis and beyond providing food they were described as places where people met and socialised, played board games and/or where broader health and social services may be made available. Some providers host community lunches, including dedicated sessions for older people with board games to build friendships and access to broader services.

Examples of gap-filling initiatives included supporting schools that were not part of the school lunches programme with rescued surplus food that could be used to make lunches, supporting school breakfast programmes, and developing meals for older people who could not afford meals on wheels.



Building food resilience through skills development

FSC has also supported community garden initiatives that simultaneously build skills while supplying nutritious produce, contributing to longer-term food resilience. In one area, the investment enabled some gardens to scale up and create revenue to support the system while giving produce to others in need. Some providers offer seedlings and education to help households establish their own gardens and become more self-sufficient. Providers often leverage what is available in the community to support these gardens, such as collecting coffee grounds to improve soil nutrient density.

Many providers have added educational elements to strengthen food security within communities, improving their ability to use food offered effectively. This includes education about nutrition and how to make cheap meals, developing cookbooks that included recipes from different cultural heritages, providing online or in-person cooking classes or guidance on how to use unfamiliar items, meal kits, and menu suggestions for self-selection. For example, one local food provider described how NZFN worked with them when they received a glut of unfamiliar items to educate their community on how the products could be used. The ability of regional food hubs and local food providers to pivot in response to what food is available demonstrates the adaptive capacity that the FSC programme has helped build.

Community-building approaches

Community building is core to many providers' work and ties directly to their welcoming and mana-enhancing approach. Capacity building through FSC grants has supported regional food hubs and local food providers to develop community-focused approaches to food security. A community-focused approach has taken a range of forms. Some providers work closely with local Iwi, ensuring food reaches marae and people in need within their communities. Others collaborate with community organisations, such as partnering with local pharmacies to put together health packs distributed alongside food or working with the Māori Women's Welfare League to preserve excess donations through pickling and jam-making. In addition, as part of ensuring that food is shared with those that need it most, two regional food hubs described using FSC-funded food supply to support community activities such as music and movement classes, church groups, anger management sessions and other support groups. This approach was designed to give people who may feel too ashamed to seek help with food with access to food and to help keep their mana intact.

Providers refine innovation through trial and adaptation

The FSC investment model allows for innovation and learning, including recognition that not all initiatives will succeed. For example, one provider ran a pilot 'produce bag pop-up' but found they were not satisfied with the quality of food and were committing labour to support someone else's business model while going backwards economically. Although the community valued the service, the provider shut it down and built their own relationships with farmers and growers, relaunching the service with direct purchasing relationships. This ability to test, learn, and adapt approaches demonstrates how the FSC programme has supported locally responsive innovation rather than requiring providers to persist with models that do not work for their specific context.



Diverse service models in South Auckland

In South Auckland FSC funding has enabled the food security ecosystem to develop diverse, locally-tailored service models that respond to the specific needs of the community. In this area, several organisations operate as both regional hubs and local providers, giving them dual capacity to manage food distribution infrastructure while delivering direct community services.

One organisation operating as both hub and provider has developed multiple initiatives designed for their community's Pacific and Māori populations. These include an initiative in which commercial fishing entities donate excess products, weekly community lunches serving 140 families, community gardens, and meal kits with simple recipes in response to feedback that people did not know how to use unfamiliar ingredients. The FSC funding enabled these innovations through creating organisational capacity to test approaches, learn what works, and adapt based on community response. For example, the provider piloted a produce pop-up partnership but found the quality and economics unsustainable, so built direct relationships with growers and relaunched the service under their own control.

Other organisations in this area have developed different models suited to their community contexts. One provider transitioned from traditional foodbank to social supermarket, enabling households to shop and select items rather than receiving pre-packed parcels, supported by Pacific recipe books and cooking demonstrations. Another organisation, part of a larger entity delivering multiple services, uses food distribution as the entry point for households to access driver licensing support, employment services, and education support. The goal across these diverse models is supporting households toward financial independence rather than creating long-term dependency on food parcels.

The FSC funding model's flexibility enables this diversity of approaches. Organisations have freedom to develop innovations meeting their specific community needs and culturally appropriate approaches for Pacific and Māori households. The dual role of some organisations as both hubs and providers creates additional capacity to coordinate food supply while simultaneously innovating in service delivery, highlighting how FSC investment across different organisational types and levels enables both system coordination and community-responsive innovation.

3.1.5 Role of FSC funding in sustaining the food security ecosystem

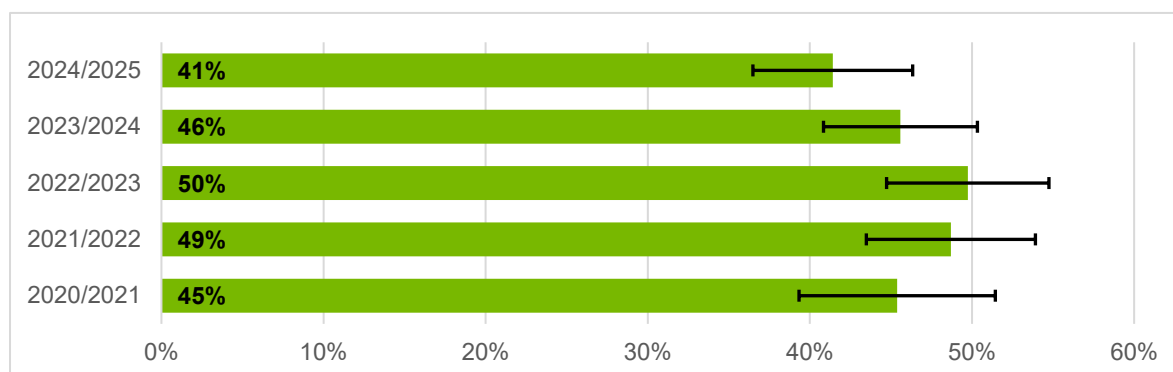
The evaluation examined what the FSC investment has enabled within the food distribution system and the extent to which these developments would be sustainable without ongoing FSC funding. It explored both the impact of the current contributory funding and identified where gaps in the system would likely develop if it was withdrawn.

Regional food hubs and local food providers that responded to the survey reported that on average, FSC grants provided between 41% and 50% of the funding needed to deliver their food services (Figure 17).⁵ This reflects organisations where MSD is a contributory rather than primary funder; national partner agencies were not surveyed. The proportion increased from

⁵ We (the authors) recognise the effort respondents went to supply accurate information to this survey question, in several cases following up with an email to give more accurate figures.

45% in 2020/2021 to 50% in 2022/2023, before decreasing to 41% in 2024/2025. Most (95% Confidence Interval) of the funding for food service provision provided for by FSC grants fell between 32% and 59%.

Figure 17: Percentage and 95% confidence interval (CI) of the average total funding for food service provided by the FSC grant (N=46, 46, 42, 34, 27)



The evaluation found that the importance of FSC funding varies across organisations, with its impact on organisational viability and service delivery varying substantially depending on what the funding enables.

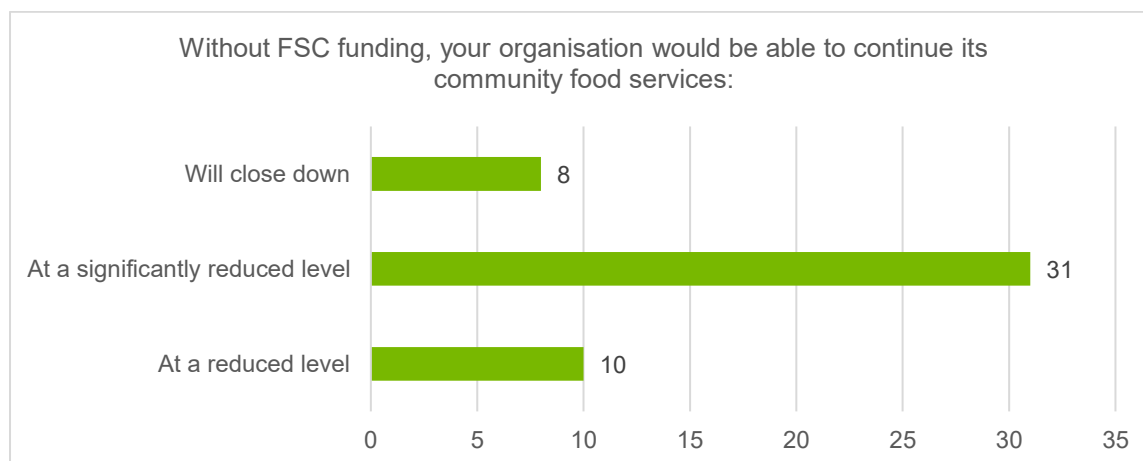
The FSC programme provides foundational operational funding

For most regional food hubs and local food providers interviewed, FSC funding serves as critical baseline operational funding that determines organisational viability. The funding's importance to sustainability exceeded its proportional share of organisations' total budgets because of what it covers rather than the amount it provides. Even for organisations where FSC contributes 20-40% of budgets, the funding determines organisational viability because it covers operational costs (staff salaries, rates, electricity, and warehouse rent) that are among the most difficult to fund from other sources and cannot be readily substituted.

Regional food hubs and local food providers emphasised that FSC funding's flexibility allows it to cover operational costs such as staff salaries, rates, electricity and warehouse rent - costs that are among the most difficult to fund from other sources. While philanthropic donors typically fund capital items and equipment, operational costs remain challenging to secure. Providers emphasised that without operational funding, services could not continue regardless of available capital equipment.

FSC grants also enable organisations to access other funding sources, particularly from philanthropic trusts, many of which require applicants to demonstrate baseline funding before applications can be made. Survey findings support this, with over 80% of providers indicating they would experience significant service reductions or closure without FSC funding, while only 8 of 49 providers (16%) reported ability to maintain current service levels (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Impact of FSC funding on sustainability of community food support (N=49)



For organisations where FSC plays this foundational role, loss of funding would likely result in service reductions beyond pre-FSC levels of operation. Both funding uncertainty and funding limitations threaten organisational sustainability. One local food provider explained that uncertainty about funding continuation had led to temporary closures in the past, with loss of staff and volunteers in the process. They were only able to reopen when another FSC grant was confirmed.

Two hubs and three local food providers stated they were already running at deficits, drawing on financial reserves to cover operational shortfalls. For these organisations, FSC funding has not increased in line with rising costs such as wages, rent and utilities meaning the real value of the funding is declining. These regional food hubs and local food providers emphasised that this situation was not sustainable.

Any reduction of funding would affect smaller organisations more severely, as they lack the diversified funding base and fundraising capacity of larger providers, meaning even modest reductions could threaten their viability. For larger and more established providers, core operations would likely continue, sustained by their diversified funding base and established fundraising capacity. Two of the providers interviewed believed the impact of withdrawn or reduced FSC funding would not be substantial for their operations, though they acknowledged that very few providers had their level of capacity to fundraise successfully.

However, interview evidence indicates that even these viable providers would lose the enhanced capability FSC enables. Providers that were interviewed stated that if FSC funding was no longer available, they would focus resources on core operations rather than innovation and adaptation, limiting their ability to respond creatively to emerging community needs. Similarly, the staffing levels that create time for relationship-building with whānau and holistic assessment of household needs would be reduced, potentially reverting to more transactional food distribution. While these organisations would continue distributing food, the responsiveness and dignity of that support would likely diminish.

The system-level impacts of FSC investment have limited sustainability without ongoing operational funding

The FSC investment has built infrastructure, capability and relationships that would have varying degrees of sustainability if ongoing funding ceased:

- Physical infrastructure (including warehousing, chillers, freezers, food transport, and pallet jacks or forklifts) would largely remain available, though maintaining functionality requires ongoing operational funding for electricity, repairs and eventual replacement.
- The three-tiered distribution model requires ongoing operational funding at all three levels to function effectively. NZFN's national distribution model, regional hub operations and local provider networks all depend on sustained capacity to accept and distribute food reliably.
- The capability development and sector knowledge built through the work of AFRA and Kore Hiakai would partially persist. Interview evidence indicates that knowledge about food safety and handling, nutritional content of food parcels, and culturally responsive practice has been embedded across the sector. Resources developed collaboratively would remain available. However, the ongoing convening role, sector support, and knowledge sharing would be reduced without continued funding for these organisations' operations.
- FSC funding has supported development of relationships between food rescue hubs and food suppliers (e.g., supermarkets, local growers) as well as relationships between organisations at different levels of the supply chain. Many of these relationships would likely continue, particularly where they have been operating successfully for several years. However, maintaining partnerships requires consistent and reliable engagement. Businesses need confidence that organisations have capacity to accept and distribute food safely and consistently. Regional food hubs noted that demonstrating this reliability was essential to securing and maintaining supermarket and business partnerships.
- The investment has built institutional knowledge about emergency response and supported relationships between regional food hubs and local food providers and civil defence teams. These relationships and knowledge would partially persist, though the ability to respond at scale during emergencies depends on maintaining baseline operational capacity including storage, equipment, staff and food stocks.

The interdependent nature of the food distribution supply chain means that capacity loss at any level would create inefficiencies throughout the system. Nearly all key informants, food hubs and food providers interviewed emphasised that every part of the chain needs adequate capacity for the system to function effectively. Capacity loss at any level creates bottlenecks. For example, NZFN's ability to rescue food at national level depends on regional hubs having capacity to receive and distribute it. Similarly, if local provider capacity decreased, regional hubs would face storage challenges limiting their ability to accept food from NZFN or local suppliers.



System gaps would likely develop if FSC funding was reduced or ceased

A synthesis of evidence indicates that without ongoing funding, the system would experience gaps in the following areas:

- **Operational capacity gaps:** Most regional food hubs and local food providers stated they would need to reduce staff numbers, resulting in fewer open days, loss of expertise, and reduction in service lines. These reductions would displace demand to remaining providers, increasing pressure on food distribution capacity as households still needing support would seek alternative sources.
- **Geographic coverage gaps:** In regions where FSC funding enabled establishment of new food rescue infrastructure in underserved areas such as the West Coast and Northland, withdrawal of funding could lead to closure of these newer operations. This would recreate geographic gaps in the distribution network that the FSC investment addressed.
- **Supply chain reliability gaps:** If different parts of the supply chain experience storage and distribution issues due to reduced funding, it creates risk that reliability will be reduced. This could cause businesses to reconsider food rescue partnerships, potentially returning to disposing of surplus food rather than donating it.
- **Emergency response capacity gaps:** Reduced funding could lead to loss of storage space and equipment as organisations could not cover associated operating costs, with flow-on effects limiting the supply chain's ability to hold volumes needed for emergency response. Staffing reductions would mean fewer people available to mobilise during crises and loss of institutional knowledge and relationships as experienced staff departed would reduce the sector's capacity to support emergency responses effectively.

These findings suggest that ongoing operational funding is vital to maintaining system functionality, particularly the interconnected supply chain that enables food to flow from national to regional to local levels and reach households experiencing food insecurity.



3.1.6 Evaluative assessment against KEQ1

Overall evaluative judgements on the extent to which FSC investment in national, regional, and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision has contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity (KEQ 1) are provided in Tables 3 to 5. The assessment is structured around the four evaluation criteria established in the evaluation framework: efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability.

For efficiency, effectiveness and relevance, an achievement rating and an evidence certainty rating are provided for each indicator, alongside a brief justification. In addition, a narrative summary has been provided for the sustainability criterion, which did not have specific indicators in the evaluation framework.

3.1.6.1 Efficiency of the FSC investment

The evaluation found that the FSC investment has **enhanced efficiency** of food distribution at scale, though cost reduction outcomes were mixed.

The programme substantially increased access to bulk food supplies and the scale of food distribution, with strong evidence of improved speed, reliability, and reduced food wastage. However, cost reduction varied significantly by organisation size and location, with larger organisations and those in well-connected regions experiencing greater benefits than smaller, more remote providers. This variation reflects the inherent complexity of food rescue operations and diverse regional contexts rather than programme design limitations.

Table 3: Evaluative assessment against efficiency criterion

Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
Investment has enabled regional hubs and providers to reduce the average cost of food parcels through collective purchasing, shared logistics, or other efficiencies	Partially achieved	Medium	Experiences varied by organisation size and location. Interview evidence shows three-quarters of regional hubs reported substantial cost reductions from NZFN supply, but one-quarter (primarily small-medium organisations) reported pantry staples still required local purchase. South Island providers noted logistical complexity affecting cost benefits.
Investment has improved access to bulk food supplies (both purchased and rescued) for hubs and providers, enabling distribution at greater cost efficiency and scale	Fully achieved	High	Survey responses show 94% of providers (31 of 33) reported increased ability to provide food supplies. Interview findings consistently describe NZFN's establishment substantially increasing sector capacity to rescue and distribute food at scale.
Scale and reach of food distribution (tonnage, parcels, households supported) has increased	Fully achieved	High	Administrative data shows food volumes increased from 7.4 million to 10.4 million kilograms (2023/24 to 2024/25). Interview evidence confirms expansion to previously underserved geographic areas including West Coast and Northland.
Investment has improved speed and reliability of food distribution during both business-as-usual and emergency contexts	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey data shows majority of providers (61-68%) reported improvements in delivering food on time, adapting quickly to changing needs, and operating consistently. Interview evidence supports this. However, approximately one-third of providers did not report improvements, primarily because FSC funding represented too small a proportion of budgets to impact operations.
There is reduced food wastage through improved coordination, logistics, and redistribution mechanisms	Fully achieved	Medium	Evaluation found evidence of improved coordination enabling redistribution when local surpluses occur, and NZFN's national operations redirect cancelled exports and seasonal surpluses. Three-tiered model enables both upward and downward food flows to avoid waste. However, food wastage was not directly measured through waste data.



3.1.6.2 Effectiveness of the FSC investment

The FSC investment has been **mostly effective** in building system capacity and capability to source, store, and distribute food at scale, while strengthening the sector's professionalism and emergency response capability.

The programme effectively connected the food security system to food production systems and contributed to broader social development outcomes. However, success in strengthening relationships and capability development was uneven, with 40-50% of providers not reporting improvements in these areas. This partial achievement reflects diverse starting points across organisations, with some already having strong networks or accessing capability building through alternative channels.

Table 4: Evaluative assessment against effectiveness criterion

Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
Investment has strengthened social capital and connections within and between the national, regional and local levels of the food secure communities' ecosystem	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey shows 65% of local providers and 47% of regional hubs reported strengthened relationships, enabling resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and collaborative initiatives. However, over one-third did not report relationship strengthening, often due to strong pre-existing networks, geographic isolation limiting networking opportunities, or capacity constraints preventing relationship-building engagement.
Investment has contributed to providers having a better understanding of effective practice and increased ability to apply it, supported by access to professional development resources	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey shows 56% of providers reported capability increases from AFRA and Kore Hiakai support, with interview evidence describing specific practice improvements in food safety, nutritional awareness (Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure), and culturally responsive approaches. However, 44% did not report increases, reflecting alternative capability-building channels, operational differences making resources less relevant, or capacity constraints limiting engagement with sector initiatives.
Scale and reach of food distributed through the infrastructure (national, regional, local) is proportionate to regional need	Partially achieved	Low	FSC investment enabled establishment of new infrastructure in previously underserved areas (West Coast, Northland) and survey responses showed broad geographic coverage. However, the evaluation cannot determine whether distribution is proportionate to actual regional need, as this would require comprehensive demand data not available within evaluation scope.



Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
The food security system demonstrates increased resilience, and ability to scale up, to address future emergencies and crises when food production and distribution is disrupted	Partially achieved	High	Survey data shows 61-66% of providers who experienced emergencies reported FSC supported their emergency response capacity (delivering on time, adapting, operating dependably). Interview evidence found rapid response capability during 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events, with FSC-funded infrastructure enabling surge capacity. Nearly all organisations have built institutional knowledge and civil defence relationships.
Food security system has been effectively connected to the food production system (e.g., food waste diversion, food rescue)	Fully achieved	High	FSC investment established integrated three-tiered supply chain connecting food producers and retailers to distribution networks. NZFN's national-level rescue operations, regional hub relationships with local supermarkets and growers, and expanded rescue infrastructure demonstrate effective connection to food production system.
FSC investment has contributed to the broader social development outcomes sought by MSD, such as alleviating the impacts of material hardship on families	Fully achieved	Medium	KEQ 2 findings provide evidence of FSC contributions to improved household food security, reduced financial pressure, decreased stress, and maintained engagement in education and employment. Evaluation did not include direct household engagement, but did identify outcomes based on provider observations (76% reported decreased stress/improved health), survey data, and limited administrative data.

3.1.6.3 Relevance of the FSC investment

The FSC investment model is **highly relevant** for addressing food insecurity across diverse contexts, functioning effectively in both business-as-usual and emergency situations.

The three-tiered approach functions effectively in both business-as-usual and emergency contexts, with the same infrastructure serving dual purposes. The outcomes-focused funding model enabled regional and local flexibility to develop initiatives proportionate to community needs, filling critical gaps not addressed by other programmes. This flexibility and responsiveness demonstrate strong alignment between the programme design and the complex, varied nature of food insecurity across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Table 5: Evaluative assessment against relevance criterion

Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
Investment has helped alleviate gaps not addressed by other initiatives such as the school lunches programme	Fully achieved	Medium	Interview evidence indicates providers fill critical gaps including where lunch programmes are unavailable and supporting those not eligible for other assistance. Providers reported avoiding service duplication and complementing existing community initiatives. However, systematic comparison with other government food security initiatives was beyond evaluation scope.
Regional hubs and providers have the flexibility to lead initiatives that are proportionate to regional and local need	Fully achieved	High	Evaluation found the outcomes-focused funding model enabled diverse locally-tailored innovations including social supermarkets, community cafés, produce markets, and community gardens responding to specific community needs. Survey shows the majority of providers reported ability to respond creatively to unique community needs. Interview evidence demonstrates adaptations to specific contexts, with ability to test, learn, and discontinue approaches that do not work.
The FSC investment model (national, regional, local) is relevant for addressing food insecurity in business-as-usual and emergency welfare response contexts	Fully achieved	High	Evaluation demonstrates three-tiered model functions effectively in both contexts. Business-as-usual operations create baseline capacity that can be rapidly scaled during emergencies, as demonstrated in 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events. Survey and interview data consistently support dual functionality, with same infrastructure and relationships serving both purposes.

3.1.6.4 Sustainability of the FSC investment

The infrastructure, capability, and relationships built through FSC investment would only be **partially sustainable** without ongoing funding.

Should funding be reduced or withdrawn, physical assets and sector knowledge would largely remain for a time, but operational capacity depends on sustained investment. The interdependent nature of the three-tiered infrastructure means capacity loss at any level would create system-wide impacts. Over 80% of providers indicated they would experience significant service reductions or closure without FSC funding, highlighting the programme's critical role in maintaining system functionality. Long-term sustainability would require either continued investment or alternative funding models, which was beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess.

3.2 Effectiveness in supporting households experiencing food insecurity

This section addresses KEQ 2: How well has the programme supported households experiencing food insecurity?

The evaluation found that:

- The FSC programme has been effective in supporting a diverse cross-section of New Zealand households experiencing food insecurity, with intentional diversification of the provider network enabling culturally appropriate support. The investment enabled partnerships with Pacific providers, Ethnic Communities providers, Māori providers, and mainstream organisations, allowing households to access support that aligns with their cultural identity and dietary preferences.
- FSC investment has enabled providers to deliver support in ways that maintain household mana and dignity, moving beyond emergency food relief to address underlying causes of food insecurity. The increased capacity has allowed providers to spend time building trusting relationships with families/whānau, enabling them to connect households with wraparound services addressing debt management, financial pressures, and other underlying drivers of food insecurity.
- There is evidence that food support contributes to improvements across multiple dimensions of household wellbeing, including decreased stress levels, improvements in mental and physical health, maintained engagement in employment and training, and children's continued participation in education.
- However, increased demand for food support continues to put pressure on provider capacity, with growing numbers of households experiencing food insecurity for the first time. This includes households who have lost employment, working families whose incomes cannot cover costs, and increasing numbers of older people seeking food support. While FSC funding has improved the food security ecosystem's ability to respond to these households, the increasing demand is stretching the system's capacity and infrastructure.

3.2.1 Households that benefit from food support

Food insecurity is seldom due to poor financial decision-making

Based on their interactions with clients, local food providers reported a common pattern in how households arrive at food insecurity. Providers explained that clients describe covering non-negotiable costs first; rent must be paid to maintain housing, and power is essential for daily functioning. Food becomes the "negotiable" cost, that can be reduced or cut when household resources are stretched. As rents rise and the cost of living increases, clients report having little to no money left for food after essential bills are paid. Business closures and reduced hours in primary industries have compounded these pressures.

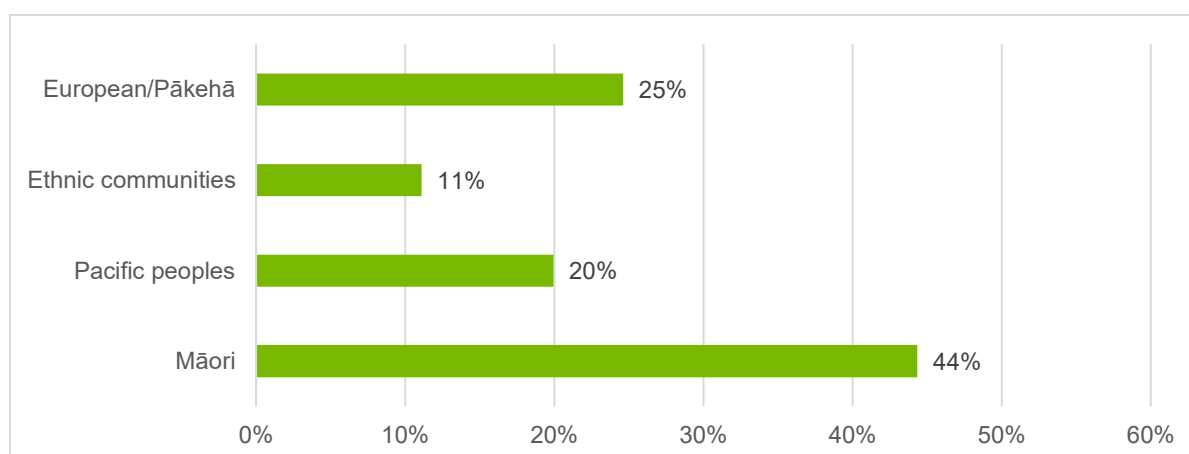
Through conversations with clients accessing support, local food providers observed that only a small minority of households experiencing food insecurity face difficulties because of poor choices. Instead, food insecurity is typically triggered by unexpected costs or events, such as a car needing urgent repair when it is essential for getting to work, an unexpectedly large power bill, the cost of school uniforms or swimming gear at the start of the school year, or family bereavement requiring travel. For some households, the need for food support is one-off, tied to a specific financial shock. Others need support for a period while recovering from a setback. A smaller group experiences chronic, ongoing food insecurity.

A diverse cross-section of New Zealand households are accessing food support

Survey responses (Figure 19) indicate that local food providers support people from multiple ethnic groups, with Māori representing the largest proportion of those supported (44%), followed by European/Pākehā, Pacific peoples, and Ethnic Communities. This pattern reflects both the overrepresentation of Māori and Pacific peoples as a proportion of the population experiencing food insecurity, and the reach of FSC-funded providers across diverse communities.

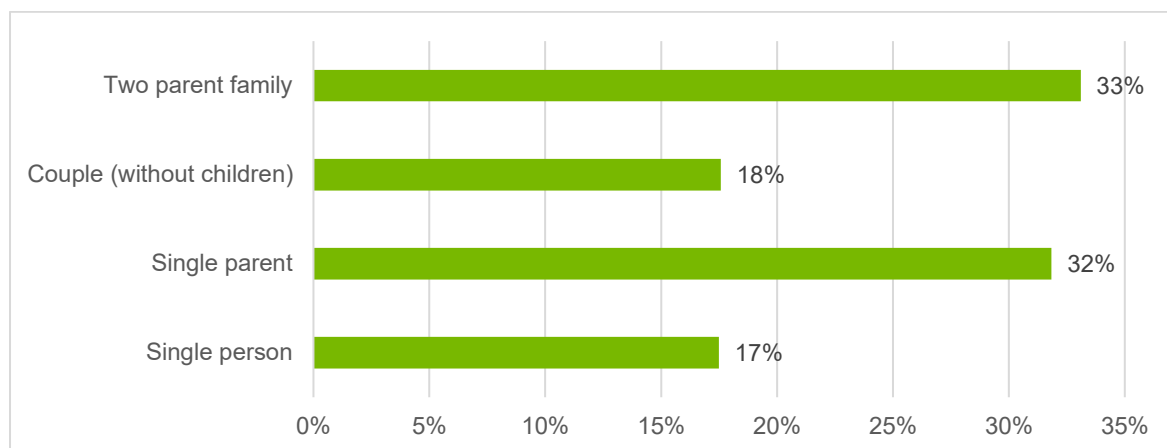
Local food provider interviews confirmed that while Māori and Pacific communities have historically been the primary groups accessing food support, the range of households seeking assistance has broadened in recent years. Some local food providers reported increases in migrant communities accessing support including Pacific Island Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers, migrants from Asian countries (particularly Filipino), and Middle Eastern households. Local food providers also reported seeing migrants in particularly vulnerable situations, including people not in the country legally and family members of migrant workers whose expected support networks have not materialised.

Figure 19: Ethnicity of households accessing support from FSC-funded providers (N=27)



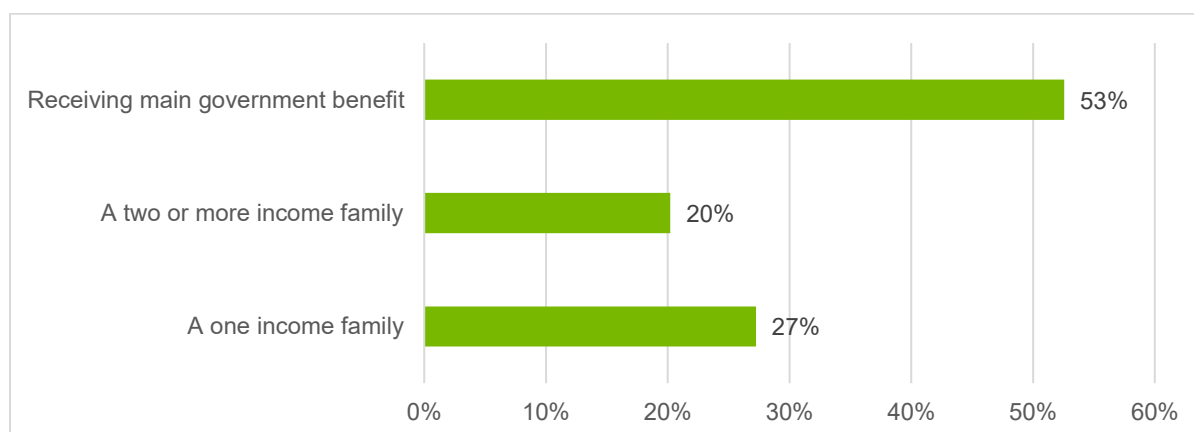
Survey results indicate that support is accessed by a range of household types. Two-parent families represent the largest proportion at 33%, closely followed by single parents at 32% (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Household types accessing support from FSC-funded providers (N=34)



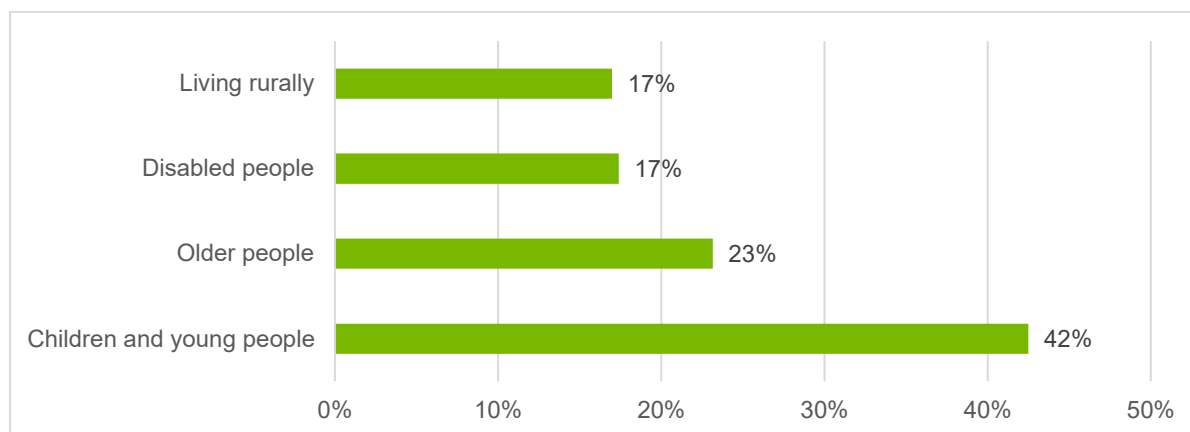
In relation to income, survey responses show that over half of those accessing support (53%) are receiving a main government benefit, while 27% are one-income families and 20% are families with two or more incomes (Figure 21). Local food provider interviews confirmed that benefit-dependent households have a higher likelihood of requiring food support than other groups, with providers noting increasing numbers of beneficiaries seeking assistance.

Figure 21: Income sources of households accessing support (N=34)



Survey responses indicate that children and young people represent the largest proportion of other demographic groups accessing support (42%), followed by older people, disabled people and those living rurally (Figure 22). Local food providers confirmed that many of their clients have children, with the financial pressure of raising a family driving people to seek food support.

Figure 22: Other demographic characteristics of those accessing support (N=34)



The type of households requiring food support is changing

Interview findings reinforced the diverse composition of households accessing support, and highlighted demographic shifts. Across regions, providers described the 'working poor' as a growing proportion of those seeking assistance, including two-income families where both adults are working but collectively cannot meet expenses. Multigenerational and/or multiple families sharing one household with multiple working adults but still unable to cover costs were also accessing support. Another group experiencing recurring food insecurity are seasonal workers in industries such as fruit picking or meat processing, who have irregular income when seasonal work is not available, with the irregular nature of this work combined with low wages creating ongoing vulnerability.

About half of the providers interviewed reported increases in migrant communities accessing support, including Pacific Island Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers, migrants from Asian countries (particularly Filipino), and Middle Eastern households. These providers also reported seeing migrants in particularly vulnerable situations, including people whose visa status had lapsed and family members of migrant workers whose expected support networks had not materialised.

In large urban areas such as Auckland and Wellington, most of the providers interviewed reported seeing households that have previously been financially comfortable but have lost employment in the current economic environment. Providers described this shift as moving from supporting the poor and working poor to now supporting previously middle-class households who cannot reduce their fixed costs. Providers in these urban areas also noted increasing numbers of single men in transitional housing, many lacking cooking facilities and relying on cooked meals from providers.

Most providers also reported notable recent increases in older people seeking food support, with pensioners and retirees described as showing substantial growth. Two providers raised concerns about grandparents caring for grandchildren without additional financial support, noting they were seeing more of these situations recently.



Demand for food support is increasing

Two national level organisations reported that approximately 30% of those accessing support are doing so for the first time, showing that food insecurity is reaching households who have not previously needed assistance. Providers across the network described experiencing growing demand for their services. The scale of this growth is substantial: one provider reported that a busy day five years ago meant supporting 100 people, but they are now well above that figure each day. Another provider described growth from 20 families two years ago to 120 families currently, with some days requiring them to turn people away. The visible signs of this demand are evident in the large queues at community food providers in some locations.

Local food providers consistently reported increased pressure on their services. Three providers stated that there were affected by the closure or reduction of other food support services, reporting that clients had told them they were seeking support because their previous source of community food support had closed. This concentration of demand among remaining providers means that while population-level food insecurity may be stable, individual providers are experiencing intensifying pressure that tests their capacity and infrastructure

3.2.2 Provider capacity to respond to diverse household needs

The initiative has increased diversity within the provider landscape to better meet household needs

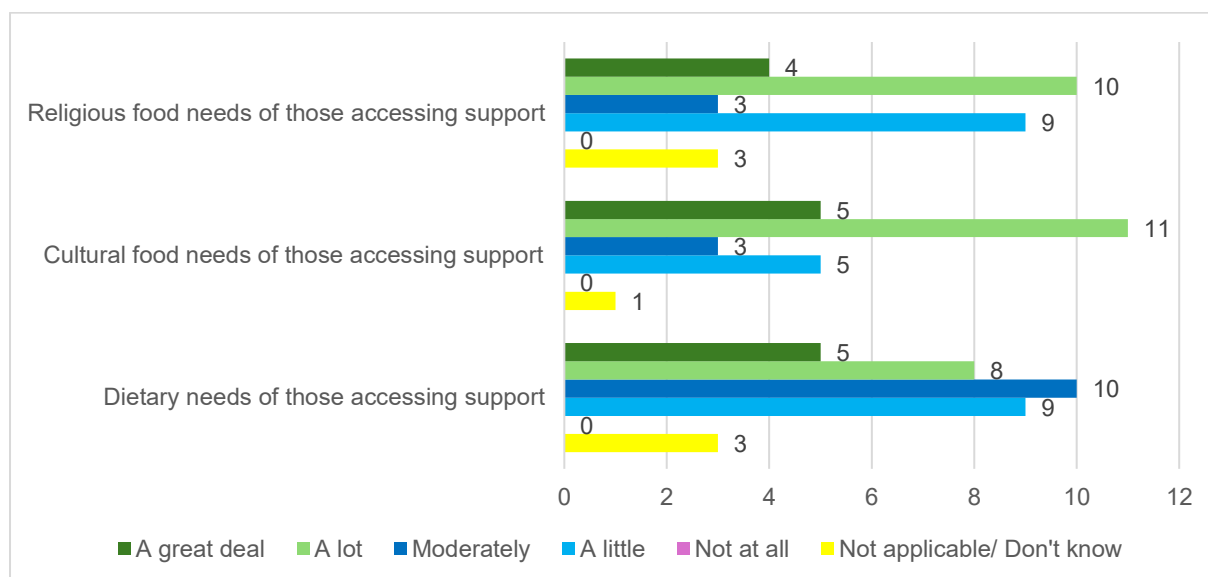
The evaluation found that FSC investment enabled diversification of the local food provider network to better meet the diverse needs of communities experiencing food insecurity. Key informants described how MSD regional teams had undertaken engagement early in the FSC planning process, to identify appropriate partners who could reach priority communities. This process recognised that some of the main established providers did not necessarily have the reach needed to engage with diverse communities.

The investment allowed for growth in the number of providers supported, with deliberate partnerships formed with Pacific providers, Ethnic Communities providers, Māori providers, and mainstream organisations. Key informants described this as creating a healthy environment for responding to community needs. This diversification enables households to access support that aligns with their cultural identity and preferences. For Māori, Pacific, and Ethnic Communities households, accessing food support from providers who understand their cultural context, dietary preferences, and community norms creates more appropriate support. Providers with strong community connections bring knowledge about dietary preferences and requirements. Many providers, including marae-based organisations, described how they know their communities well and understand which families are in need and how best to support them.

Provider survey responses indicate that FSC funding has enabled meaningful improvements in meeting diverse household needs (Figure 23). Excluding Not applicable or don't know, the majority of providers reported being able to meet cultural food needs moderately or more of the time (19 of 24 providers) compared to those reporting they could do so not at all or only a little (5 providers). Similarly, 17 of 26 providers reported meeting religious needs moderately

or more of the time compared to 9 who could do so not at all or only a little. For dietary needs, 23 of 32 providers reported meeting these moderately or more of the time compared to 9 who reported not at all or a little.

Figure 23: Extent to which FSC funding has improved provider ability to meet religious, cultural and dietary needs of those accessing support (N=29 Religious needs; N=25 Cultural needs; N=35 Dietary needs)



Between 21-35% of providers that reported not being able to meet cultural, religious or dietary needs likely reflects the inherent unpredictability of food rescue, which limits consistent access to foods meeting specific requirements such as gluten-free or halal food.

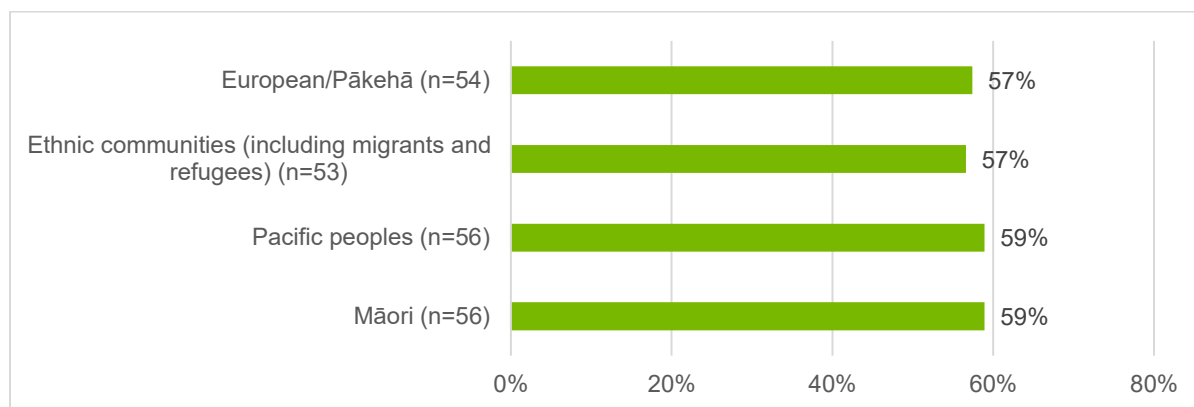
Where providers can meet these needs, the diversified provider network creates additional benefits. As described in section 3.1.4, the network includes both organisations that specialise in food security alongside those that provide food as part of a holistic approach in which food is provided alongside wider social services supporting households. This creates additional benefits: when people access culturally appropriate food support, they can also access the broader services that provider offers.

The investment has also strengthened feedback mechanisms, with providers communicating to NZFN what types of foods their communities want. As one key informant noted, this ability to capture and respond to community dietary needs represents an important ‘soft’ aspect of the infrastructure that FSC investment has helped build.

Provider diversification has increased reach to diverse households

As a result of the diversification of the provider network described above, FSC-funded providers reported increased reach to diverse populations. Provider survey responses indicate that the FSC investment was effective in increasing reach to diverse populations in need of support. Approximately three in five providers reported that FSC funding has enabled them to better reach Māori and Pacific peoples over time, with similar proportions reporting improved reach to Ethnic Communities including migrants and refugees and European/Pākehā (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Percentage of survey respondents reporting that FSC funding has enabled better reach to ethnic groups



Similarly, 53-57% of local food providers reported that over time the FSC funding has enabled them to reach a range of household types (Figure 25) and households with different income sources (Figure 26).

Figure 25: Percentage of survey respondents reporting that FSC funding has enabled better reach to household types

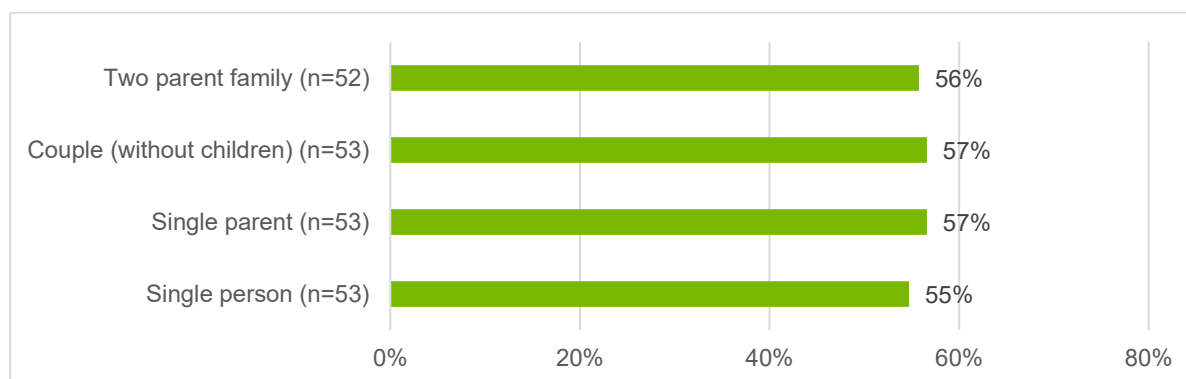
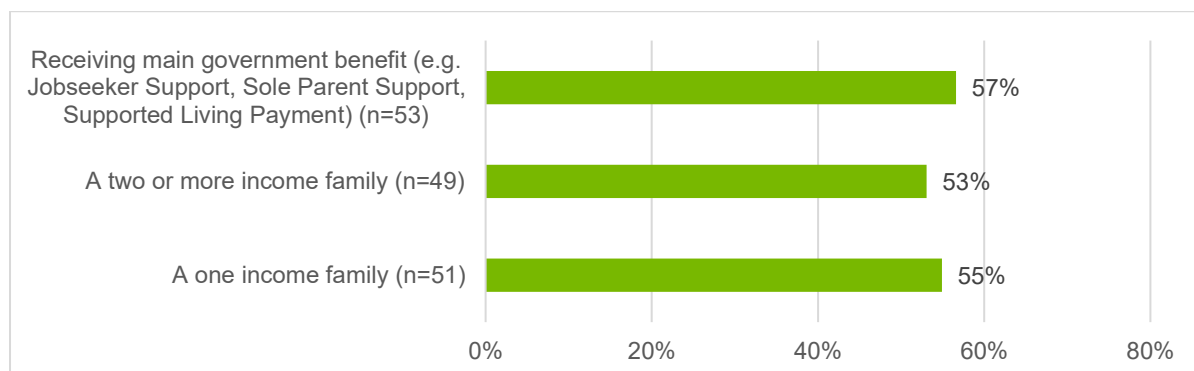
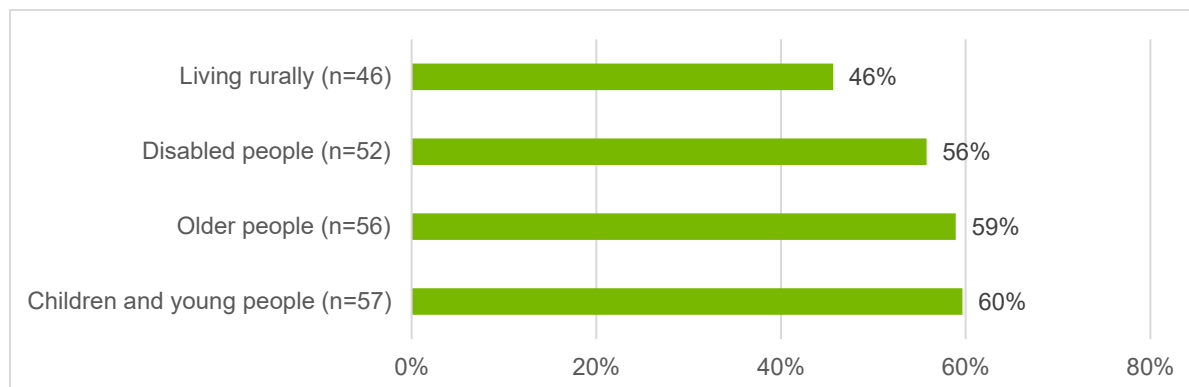


Figure 26: Percentage of survey respondents reporting that FSC funding has enabled better reach to household income sources



While regional food hub and local food provider survey results on improved reach to disabled people, older people and children and young people was similar to the above results, a lower percentage of providers reported enhanced reach to those living rurally (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Percentage of survey respondents reporting that FSC funding has enabled better reach to demographic groups



Interview findings provided insight into why about 40% of providers did not report increased reach to all population groups. The most common explanation was that FSC funding, while valuable, represented too small a proportion of total costs to enable substantial expansion. For example, one provider explained that their FSC grant accounted for only 10% of total costs, which was absorbed by price increases rather than enabling increased reach. Another provider reported being already at capacity, with FSC funding supporting maintenance of existing services amid rising costs rather than expansion.

About a third of the providers interviewed noted that their geographic location or community demographics limited potential reach to certain population groups. For example, providers in rural South Island areas or smaller towns had limited populations of certain groups such as Pacific communities. Others do not aim for universal reach across all population groups. For instance, while open to all within their community, some Māori providers stated that they primarily serve Māori whānau any that any increased reach came from within this population.

FSC investment in local food provider capacity has created the conditions for providers to spend more time building relationships and trust with whānau

As described in section 3.1.4, local food providers have found building trusting relationships has become increasingly important. FSC investment in local food provider capacity has created the conditions for providers to spend more time building these relationships and trust with families/whānau.

Local food providers reported that it can take two or three visits to build the trust needed to understand the circumstances and needs of a family or whānau. Some providers stated that they use food as an initial point of contact. With improved capacity, providers can build on this initial engagement, spending time with whānau to understand their situation and develop appropriate responses, which may include referral to other services.

A small number of providers have developed proactive outreach approaches enabled by increased capacity. For example, one provider has a social worker dedicated to older people who goes out to find those who need help rather than waiting for them to seek assistance.



This proactive approach addresses what providers observe as particular reluctance of older people to ask for support and ensures vulnerable populations receive help even when they would not initiate contact themselves.

The increased capacity and capability generated through the FSC programme has contributed to some providers moving beyond simply distributing food parcels, to creating welcoming, mana-enhancing environments that reduce stigma and barriers. Local food providers described drawing on guidance from Kore Hiakai and other regional and national entities to strengthen their practice of providing flexibility, choice, and manaakitanga. With adequate capacity, providers can create welcoming spaces through gestures such as offering cups of tea, operating with a non-judgemental approach that aims to see people as “whānau members rather than clients.” Some providers work to reframe food support as helping prevent food waste and supporting the environment, further reducing stigma.

Others have adapted their service delivery models to meet households where they are, including extensive home delivery and support in the community. These flexible approaches help ease people into accepting support and reduce the stigma associated with food insecurity, creating opportunities for conversations about other ways providers could help address wider household challenges. As one local food provider noted, the more able they are at providing an experience that upholds mana, the more likely people are to access support when they need it.

The FSC investment has supported shifts to choice-based models

As part of their mana enhancing practice, several local food providers described how they have moved from prescriptive food parcel distribution to ‘choice model’ operations, where people can select food that meets their needs. Provider staff support households to make choices aligned with the nutritional standards established through the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure, helping ensure food selections provide balanced nutrition while respecting household preferences and autonomy. Some organisations have established vegetable and produce stalls offering wholesale produce where whānau can decide what they want to choose. This shift requires adequate space, infrastructure, and systems; investments that FSC funding has helped support.

Local food providers have also evolved their approaches to enabling choice and meeting diverse needs. Some providers leverage partnerships with other organisations, receiving vouchers or credits that they can distribute to households with specific requirements - for example, meal vouchers from community dining initiatives for households needing prepared food, or vouchers that enable households to access food meeting dietary requirements such as celiac or religious restrictions. Some local food providers have updated their request forms to allow people to select what they want and indicate items not on standard lists, giving households more say in what they receive even when full pick-and-choose models are not feasible due to infrastructure constraints. When food parcels are made up without giving people choice, local food providers reported that most people will return items they cannot use to a donation bin when collecting food parcels, allowing food to be redistributed rather than wasted.

FSC has supported providers to better meet household dietary requirements and circumstances

As discussed in section 3.1.2, FSC investment has improved providers' capacity to source and distribute nutritious food to households, including fresh produce, dairy, meat, and eggs. At the household level, this increased capacity enables providers to make practical adjustments to meet specific dietary requirements and household circumstances where possible.

Providers described accommodating halal requirements, avoiding certain foods for diabetic clients, and offering options for households with babies and young children. However, providers noted they cannot always meet all specialised dietary needs, such as providing gluten-free food at scale.

Providers also need to adapt to the practical realities of households' living situations, recognising that people experiencing housing insecurity cannot store frozen food or keep fresh produce and need food they can eat immediately. This requires different approaches to food provision than for households with stable housing and storage capacity.

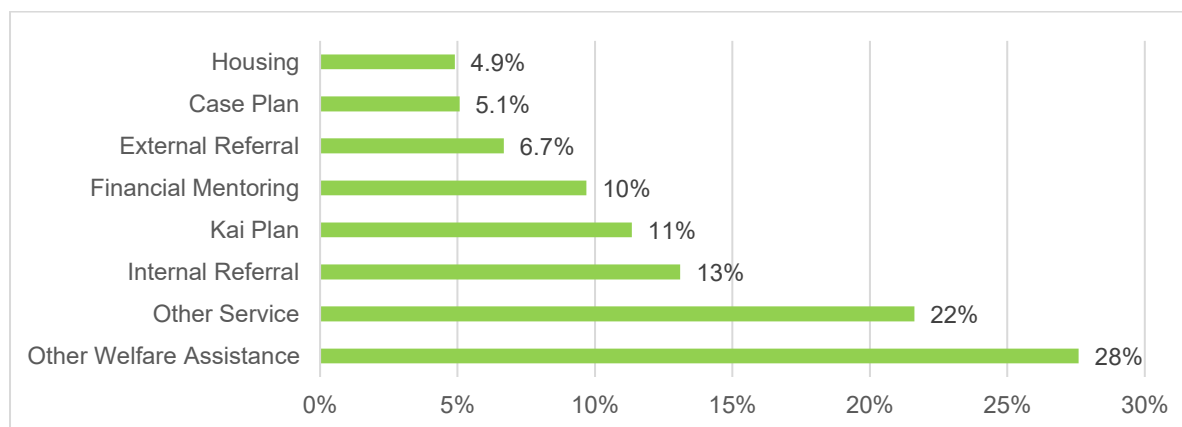
3.2.3 Changes in household food security and wellbeing

The findings presented here describe changes in household food security and wellbeing associated with FSC programme support, based on provider observations. As with all interventions operating within complex systems, households experience changes resulting from multiple interacting factors, including other government support, informal community networks, and household coping strategies. Additionally, as the evaluation did not include direct household engagement, findings reflect provider perspectives on household outcomes rather than households' own accounts of their experiences. This complexity means the findings presented here describe changes associated with FSC programme support rather than changes directly caused by it.

As discussed in section 3.1.4, FSC's funding model has enabled providers to develop capacity for holistic support that addresses food insecurity alongside other household challenges. The flexible nature of FSC funding allows providers to employ staff with skills in assessment and engagement with families experiencing hardship, moving beyond emergency food provision to address underlying causes of food insecurity. This includes providers developing expertise in identifying complex needs, building trust with households, and connecting people with appropriate services such as employment support, housing assistance, and health services.

Administrative data from TSA reinforced these findings. Figure 28 shows an example of the kinds of services offered between one and three months after seeking food support and their relative frequency. The data shows that a kai plan (11%) was common, alongside financial mentoring (10%). Almost half (49%) of the other support provided after that initial contact for food support was for other services or other welfare assistance; indicating that the majority were presenting with complex needs requiring further assessment and longer-term support. This pattern reflects both the complexity of household needs and providers' capability to respond holistically, enabled by FSC's funding model.

Figure 28: Unique households supported by other support received (TSA admin data combined 2022/2023 to 2024/2025) (N=67,400)



Understanding household outcomes therefore requires recognising that FSC investment has built provider capacity for integrated support addressing both immediate food needs and underlying drivers of food insecurity. The following findings describe changes in household food security and wellbeing associated with FSC programme support, while acknowledging the interconnected nature of these outcomes.

The FSC programme has supported improved household food security and access to nutritious food

FSC investment has contributed to improved nutritional quality of food reaching households through multiple interconnected mechanisms. As discussed in section 3.1.3, expanded food rescue substantially increased the volume of fresh produce, meat, eggs, and dairy moving through the system. Local food providers explained that without rescued surplus food, they would be unable to include these nutritious items in food parcels, which would substantially reduce nutritional value. This infrastructure-enabled access to nutritious food is particularly important given the cost pressures households face. Providers noted that when budgets are stretched, processed foods are often more affordable than fresh healthy food, meaning many households cannot access nutritious options without support.

The increased availability of nutritious food has been complemented by capability building around nutritional quality. As discussed in Section 3.1.2, Kore Hiakai's introduction of the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure improved providers' awareness of nutritional content and influenced everyday practice. Almost all regional food hubs and local food providers reported that this tool shifted their food parcel composition toward more nutritionally balanced options, ensuring households received food that met nutritional guidelines rather than simply whatever was available.

However, the unpredictable nature of food rescue creates challenges in consistently providing specific nutritious items. Food composition often varies depending on what providers can source through rescue channels. As noted in Section 3.1.3, some nutritious foods are difficult to access through rescue due to market specifications, while others are plentiful. This variability means households cannot always access specific items they need, though the overall nutritional quality remains substantially improved from pre-FSC levels.



Providers have addressed these challenges through educational support that enables households to use unfamiliar or seasonal produce effectively. As discussed in Section 3.1.4, many providers developed recipes, cooking classes, and guidance on using seasonal items to complement the provision of nutritious food by ensuring households have the knowledge and confidence to use what they receive.

Together, these mechanisms (increased access to fresh nutritious foods through expanded rescue infrastructure, capability building around nutritional standards, and educational support for using diverse foods) mean that FSC programme investment has contributed to households not only receiving but effectively using more nutritious food than would otherwise be accessible to them.

Food support provides immediate financial relief by reducing household food expenditure, and longer-term financial stability through budget service referrals

Food parcels reduce household food expenditure, as households receive food without cost. This enables households to reallocate limited resources toward other essential costs such as rent, power, and debt repayment. Providers noted that even smaller amounts of food make a significant difference for struggling families, freeing up cash for non-negotiable expenses that would otherwise push households deeper into financial difficulty.

The link between food support and budgeting services strengthens the financial pressure relief that food parcels provide. Budget advisors help households understand their financial situations and ensure households access entitlements including Working for Families Tax Credit. These relatively small interventions can make substantial differences to household budgets, providing ongoing financial relief beyond the immediate food support.

The integration of food and budgeting support operates through various models. Some providers require all food support referrals to go through budgeting services, with households given four weeks to make an appointment and engage with budgeting support before receiving ongoing food assistance. Others take a more flexible, needs-based approach, recognising that households dealing with multiple challenges may need counselling or other services addressed first before budgeting support becomes productive.

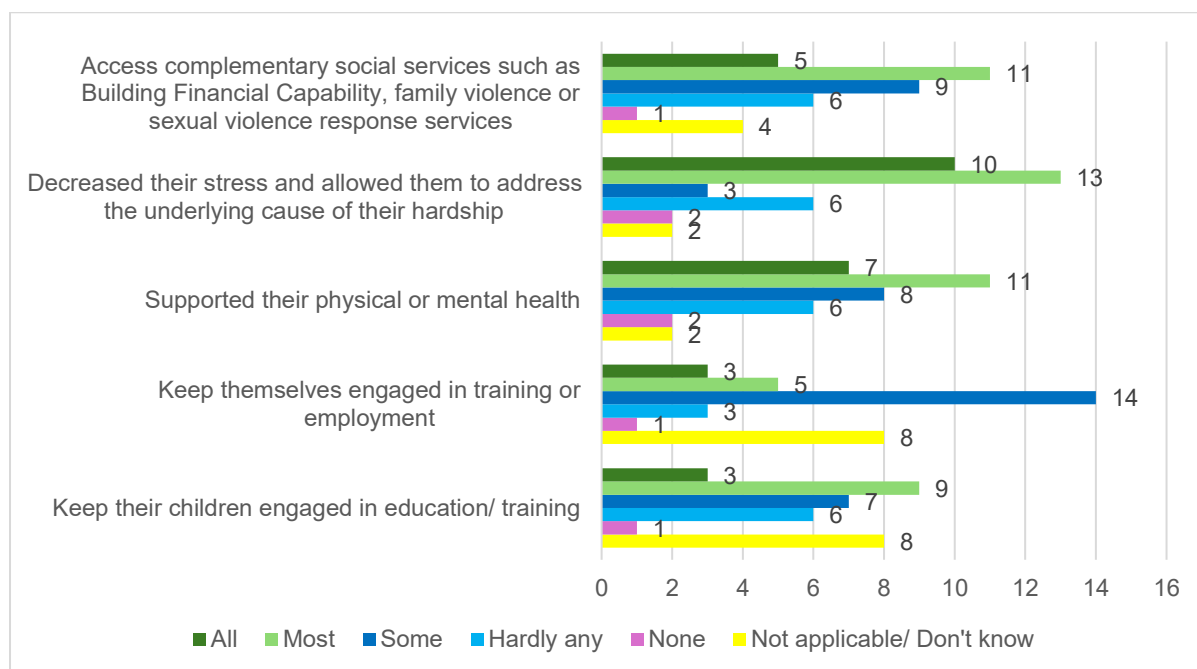
Food support contributes to improvements across multiple dimensions of household wellbeing

Stress reduction and improvements in mental and physical health

Excluding those not applicable/don't know responses, survey findings show substantial wellbeing benefits associated with food support (Figure 29):

- 76% of providers (26 of 34) reported that receiving food support decreased stress levels for recipients some, most or all of the time
- Similar proportions reported improvements in recipients' mental or physical health some, most or all of the time
- 78% of providers (25 of 32) reported that food support enabled recipients to access complementary social services some, most or all of the time.

Figure 29: Extent to which food service recipients have access wellbeing supports (N=36 Complementary services; N=36 Decreased stress; N=36 Supported wellbeing; N=34 Training/employment; N=34 Children in education/training)



Provider observations reinforced these survey findings. Providers described how food support alleviates the acute stress and anxiety associated with food insecurity. For households struggling with cost-of-living pressures, receiving food support removes the immediate worry of how to feed family members. Providers noted this stress reduction has cascading effects on mental health and longer-term physical health. The manaakitanga expressed through community lunches and food distribution contributes to positive impacts on emotional wellbeing for those receiving support.

These findings align with independent research conducted by Kore Hiakai, which surveyed 189 whānau receiving food support in Auckland and Wānaka.⁶ The study found that 93% indicated a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing and mental health through receiving food support, with 87% reporting improved health and wellbeing. While this study was geographically limited, the consistency between Kore Hiakai's findings (93% positive wellbeing impact) and provider survey results (76% reporting decreased stress and health improvements) provides validation of the mental health and wellbeing benefits associated with food support across different contexts.

Supporting engagement in education and employment

The evaluation also found that food support creates stability that enables households to maintain engagement with education and employment. Survey findings showed that 85% of providers (22 of 26) reported food support enabled recipients to stay engaged in training or

⁶ [https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/s/KH-Impacts-of-Community-Food-Support-Report DIGITAL-Nov-2025-no-cover.pdf](https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/s/KH-Impacts-of-Community-Food-Support-Report-DIGITAL-Nov-2025-no-cover.pdf)



employment some or more of the time, while 73% (19 of 26) reported that children in supported households stayed engaged in educational activities some or more of the time (Figure 29).

Providers linked food security to children's educational outcomes, reporting their observations that regular school attendance becomes possible when children have food at home and food in their lunchboxes, and families can afford to support participation in school activities rather than withdrawing children due to cost pressures.

Some providers have created opportunities for recipients to give back by becoming volunteers themselves. This helps maintain mana, build confidence, and sometimes create pathways into paid employment. The ability to contribute shifts recipients from passive beneficiaries to active community members with valued roles and developing skills.

3.2.4 Additional benefits

FSC investment has contributed to additional benefits at community and systems levels

The evaluation identified several additional outcomes that providers and key informants reported that FSC investment supported. These include:

- Strengthened collaborative relationships beyond the food security sector, including productive partnerships with local councils and community organisations. This has raised the profile of food insecurity at policy and strategic levels, meaning food security is often part of strategic conversations at councils and cross-agency fora.
- Following COVID-19 and Cyclone Gabrielle, various kai collectives and pātaka kai initiatives emerged where communities organised support themselves. While evaluation of FSC's early investment in these initiatives was outside the scope of this evaluation, the visibility and normalisation of community food support may have created enabling conditions for these grassroots innovations.
- The credibility and visibility gained through FSC investment has enabled some providers to attract additional funding from private and philanthropic sources. Social Return on Investment studies undertaken by hubs and providers demonstrate multiplier effects provide evidence that attracts funders.
- The food rescue component of FSC also creates environmental benefits through waste reduction, creating value beyond the primary food security focus.

Collectively, these additional benefits demonstrate how FSC investment has amplified impact beyond direct food provision, creating system-level changes that strengthen community capacity, enable innovation, leverage additional resources, and generate environmental value alongside social outcomes.



3.2.5 Evaluative assessment against KEQ2 criteria and indicators

Evaluative judgements on how well the FSC programme has supported households experiencing food insecurity (KEQ 2) are provided in Table 6 and Table 7Table 4. The assessment is structured around two evaluation criteria: effectiveness (the capacity and capability to meet diverse household needs) and efficacy (achievement of intended food security outcomes for households).

3.2.5.1 Effectiveness in meeting household needs

The FSC programme has been **effective** in building provider capacity and capability to meet diverse household needs, though success was uneven across the provider network.

The programme achieved strong outcomes in enabling integrated, locally relevant approaches to food security and building provider capability for relationship-based, holistic support. The intentional diversification of the provider network improved reach to priority populations, though approximately 40% of providers did not report increased reach due to funding proportions, geographic factors, or existing strong networks. The inherent unpredictability of food rescue creates limitations in consistently meeting specific dietary and cultural requirements, though the majority of providers report meeting these needs most of the time. Overall, the programme successfully strengthened provider effectiveness while acknowledging contextual constraints that limited universal achievement across all indicators.

Table 6: Evaluative assessment against the effectiveness criterion

Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
The FSC programme has contributed to providers' capacity and capability to identify and respond to the specific food security needs of households in their communities	Fully achieved	High	FSC investment enabled diversification of the provider network, with MSD regional teams identifying partners with strong connections to priority communities. Providers developed capacity to build trusting relationships conduct holistic assessment of household circumstances, and make appropriate referrals to complementary services. Interview evidence consistently describes enhanced organisational capability for relationship-building beyond transactional food distribution.
FSC programme has contributed to meeting the needs of different household types, including those most at risk of food insecurity including Māori, Pacific and single parent households	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey data shows households accessing support include Māori (44% of those supported), single parents (32%), and Pacific peoples, demonstrating reach to priority populations. Approximately 60% of providers reported better reach to Māori, Pacific peoples, and ethnic communities over time. However, about 40% did not report increased reach, primarily because FSC funding represented too small a proportion of total costs to enable substantial expansion.
Food provided meets the diverse needs of households including appropriate food types, cultural preferences, and nutritional requirements	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey responses show majority of providers reported meeting cultural needs (79%), religious needs (65%), and dietary needs (72%) moderately, most or all of the time. Interview evidence describes providers accommodating halal requirements, diabetic needs, and household circumstances. However, the inherent unpredictability of food rescue means providers cannot always access specific items households need.
The FSC programme has enabled regional hubs and providers to develop, trial and implement locally relevant solutions to household food insecurity, supporting increased self-reliance	Partially achieved	Medium	Survey shows nearly half of providers (47%) reported ability to respond creatively to unique community needs "a great deal" with another 12% "a lot". Interview evidence describes diverse innovations including social supermarkets, community gardens, produce markets, and cooking classes. However, 16 of 49 survey respondents indicated funding allowed them to respond "a little" or "not at all. Food Security Initiatives funding specifically supported innovation but was not universally accessed.



Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
Regional hubs and providers have used multiple, integrated approaches to improve food security that meet the needs of their community (e.g., choosing, cooking, growing, sharing, buying, and connecting with kai; partnering around kai; social supermarket initiatives)	Fully achieved	High	Extensive interview evidence and case examples demonstrate diverse integrated approaches across multiple contexts: social supermarkets enabling choice, community cafés providing meals and social connection, community gardens building skills while supplying produce, and partnerships with broader health and social services. Providers described using food as gateway to wraparound support addressing underlying drivers of food insecurity. The variety and integration of approaches demonstrates responsiveness to diverse community contexts and needs.

3.2.5.2 Efficacy in achieving outcomes for households

The FSC programme has **demonstrated efficacy** in achieving intended food security outcomes across multiple dimensions of household wellbeing.

The FSC programme has achieved intended food security outcomes across multiple dimensions of household wellbeing. Evaluation evidence indicates contributions to improved nutritional quality of food reaching households, reduced financial pressure through provision of food, decreased stress and anxiety, and maintained engagement in education and employment. The consistency of findings across provider observations, survey data, and independent research (Kore Hiakai) supports these conclusions despite the absence of direct household-level data collection.

Please note: All efficacy indicators were rated as fully achieved, though evidence certainty is rated medium or low due to reliance on provider observations rather than direct household verification. This limitation reflects the evaluation's methodological boundaries (no direct household engagement) rather than weakness in the evidence within those boundaries.

Table 7: Evaluative assessment against the efficacy criterion

Indicator	Achievement	Evidence certainty	Justification
FSC programme has contributed to improved household food security, including better access to nutritious food	Fully achieved	Medium	Multiple interconnected mechanisms contributed to improved nutritional quality: expanded food rescue substantially increased fresh produce, meat, and dairy volumes; Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure improved provider awareness of nutritional content; and educational support helped households use diverse foods effectively. Providers consistently reported that without rescued food they could not include nutritious items in parcels.
Households have experienced reduced financial pressure due to accessing food at cost or receiving food parcels	Fully achieved	Medium	Food parcels reduce household food expenditure. Providers reported this enables households to reallocate resources toward rent, utilities, and debt repayment. Nearly all providers either require or strongly encourage budget service engagement, with this integration supporting longer-term financial stability
Households have experienced reduced food shortage-related anxiety and stress due to receiving food parcels	Fully achieved	Low	Survey findings show 76% of providers reported recipients had shared that food support decreased stress levels and improved mental or physical health some or more of the time. This represents only unprompted feedback, suggesting actual impact may be higher. These findings align with independent Kore Hiakai research showing 93% of whānau surveyed indicated positive impact on emotional wellbeing and mental health. Providers described how food support alleviates acute stress and anxiety, with cascading effects on mental and physical health.
Households have experienced additional benefits as a result of providers' enhanced capability and capacity, such as skills development, work readiness, progression towards stability. FSC programme has contributed to employment and skills development opportunities for community members	Fully achieved	Low	Survey shows 85% of providers reported food support helped recipients stay engaged in training or employment some or more of the time, while 73% reported children in supported households stayed engaged in educational activities. Administrative data from TSA shows 49% of households received other support services beyond food within three months, indicating complex needs and integrated responses. Enhanced provider capacity created opportunities for recipients to become volunteers, helping maintain mana and build confidence while providing skill development pathways.

4 Conclusion

This section addresses KEQ 3: What lessons have been learned?

In assessing evidence against the evaluation criteria, the FSC programme has substantially achieved its objectives. The investment:

- **enhanced efficiency** of food distribution at scale (though cost reduction was mixed),
- was **effective** in building system capacity and capability
- demonstrated **strong relevance** across diverse contexts
- achieved only **partial sustainability** without continued funding.

Regarding its impact on households, the programme:

- was **effective** in building provider capacity to meet diverse household needs
- demonstrated **efficacy** in achieving household food security outcomes across multiple wellbeing dimensions.

The FSC investment has been highly effective in building a functioning three-tiered food distribution infrastructure that operates as an interconnected system. The programme was purposefully designed to link food producers and retailers with national, regional, and local distribution channels. The evaluation demonstrates this design intention has been realised, with capacity at each level enabling and amplifying the effectiveness of the others. NZFN's national-level rescue operations work in tandem with regional hub infrastructure and local provider capacity to move large volumes of food efficiently through the system and into households. This integrated approach has substantially increased the volume and variety of food distributed, particularly rescued surplus food, while building a more professional, coordinated sector with improved nutritional awareness, food safety standards, and culturally responsive practice.

However, experiences varied across organisations depending on size, geographic location, and existing infrastructure. Larger organisations and those in well-connected regions generally experienced greater cost reductions and supply consistency, while smaller organisations and those in remote areas faced different challenges around logistics and local purchasing needs. This variation reflects the complex nature of food rescue operations and diverse regional contexts rather than programme design limitations.

Effectiveness of investment in food distribution infrastructure and community provision

FSC investment has supported the development of a supply chain operating at national, regional and local levels. This has contributed to substantial increases in food volumes collected, stored and distributed. Regional food hubs and local food providers now have equipment to collect, store and distribute a wider variety and volume of foods, especially fresh



produce and meat. These foods play a critical role in improving nutritional value of food parcels and are the type of food households experiencing food insecurity are least able to afford. The use of rescued surplus food provides a cost-effective approach to supporting households as it is substantially cheaper than purchasing food, while bulk purchasing by NZFN supplements rescued food at below retail cost. This infrastructure also provides environmental benefits through reducing food waste.

Investment in AFRA and Kore Hiakai has supported sector maturation and important practice changes making support more culturally appropriate, mana-enhancing and choice-driven. AFRA has built food rescue sector capability through guidance on food handling and safety, sector networking, and knowledge sharing. Kore Hiakai has lifted capability around cultural values and nutritional awareness through tools like the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure. These changes contribute to better household outcomes by creating conditions that increase household willingness to engage with broader supports leading to longer-term solutions.

The combination of improved capacity and capability has enabled regional food hubs and local food providers to provide rapid on-the-ground support during emergencies. Organisations that have developed this emergency response capacity through FSC funding have built institutional knowledge and relationships with civil defence, with some now recognised as partners in emergency preparedness systems. These organisations provide a vital link between emergency agencies and communities, collecting direct feedback on needs and distributing essential items.

The outcomes-focused funding approach has enabled regional food hubs and local food providers to develop innovations meeting specific community needs. Organisations have avoided unnecessary service duplication, contributing to system efficiency. Innovations designed to generate greater food security include social supermarkets, community cafés providing meals and social connection, produce markets selling directly from growers at low cost, and community gardens building skills alongside food provision. These initiatives shift focus from relief to building longer-term food security.

FSC funding plays a central role in sustaining these enhanced operational capabilities. For national partners where MSD is the primary funder, the programme sustains NZFN's distribution model and rescue operations, AFRA's convening and capability-building functions, and Kore Hiakai's research and sector development work. For regional food hubs and local food providers where FSC is contributory funding (providing 41-50% of budgets), it serves as critical baseline operational funding covering staff salaries, rent, and utilities that are difficult to fund from other sources. This funding creates capacity for innovation, relationship-building, emergency response, choice-based approaches, and managing diverse food sourcing.

However, the interdependent nature of the three-tiered supply chain means capacity loss at any level creates system-wide bottlenecks affecting business-as-usual operations and emergency response capability and capacity. Over 80% of providers indicated they would experience significant service reductions or closure without FSC funding, with anticipated impacts including reduced staffing, fewer open days, loss of geographic coverage, and diminished emergency response capacity. This would reduce community resilience at a time when providers report experiencing growing demand for food support.

Effectiveness in supporting households experiencing food insecurity

Households are at the end of the supply chain built through FSC investment. The increased capacity and capability of the system has enabled substantial growth in food volumes moving through the supply chain, with this increased volume and variety reaching households experiencing food insecurity. The evaluation found evidence of effectiveness across multiple dimensions of household support.

The improvements in the community food distribution system's capacity and capability mean local food providers are better placed to support households experiencing food insecurity. Strategic development of the provider network, with partnerships formed with Māori, Pacific, Ethnic Communities, and mainstream providers, has improved reach to priority populations. The network includes both organisations specialising in food provision and those offering food as part of holistic wraparound services. Improved capability has led to greater consistency and quality of support across the system and improved nutritional content of food parcels.

How food support is delivered has changed, with local food providers adopting culturally responsive, mana-enhancing approaches. The shift from generic food parcels to choice-based models, ensuring culturally appropriate food is provided and creating welcoming environments, reduces stigma and increases household willingness to access support. How food is delivered is as important as whether it is delivered, with implications for provider selection, training of staff and volunteers, and service design.

Food support functions as a gateway to broader household outcomes rather than as an isolated intervention. Food parcels reduce household budget pressure enabling households to reallocate resources toward rent, utilities, and debt repayment, helping prevent cascading household crises. Nearly all providers either require or strongly encourage engagement with budgeting services, with this integration aiming to move households toward financial independence rather than creating ongoing dependency.

Provider perceptions indicate food support contributes to improvements across multiple dimensions of household wellbeing. Three-quarters of providers reported recipients had voluntarily shared that food support decreased stress levels and improved mental or physical health. The majority of providers (78%) reported food support enabled access to complementary services such as budgeting, housing support, and health services. Eighty-five percent of providers reported food support helped recipients stay engaged in training or employment, with similar proportions reporting children in supported households stayed engaged in educational activities. These outcomes reflect how food support creates foundational stability by removing acute anxiety of meeting basic needs, enabling households to focus on longer-term goals including education, employment, and financial stability.

The evaluation found evidence that the demographics of food insecurity are changing. Providers reported increasingly supporting the "working poor," previously middle-class households who have lost employment, older people, and migrant communities in vulnerable situations. Two national organisations reported approximately 30% of those accessing support are doing so for the first time. Providers across the network described experiencing growing demand for services.

4.1 Lessons learned

The evaluation identified several lessons with implications for understanding how FSC has achieved its outcomes and considerations for future food security investment:

Lesson 1: System design and interdependencies are an important determinant of effectiveness

The three-tiered infrastructure effectiveness derives from how the levels work together, rather than from investment at any single level. The evaluation found that capacity at each level enables or constrains the effectiveness of the others. NZFN's national-level rescue capacity depends directly on regional hubs having infrastructure to receive and redistribute volumes, which in turn depends on local providers having capacity to distribute food to households. This interdependency means investment decisions should not be made in isolation for individual tiers. Maintaining system effectiveness requires sustained investment across all three levels simultaneously, with capacity matching being critical to overall system performance.

Lesson 2: Contributory operational funding enables enhanced capability beyond organisational viability for regional hubs and local providers

For regional food hubs and local food providers where MSD is a contributory funder, the evaluation found that FSC funding's importance exceeded its proportional share of budgets because of what it covers rather than how much it provides. Operational funding for staff, rent, and utilities is among the most difficult to secure from other sources, yet it enables capabilities beyond basic service delivery. The contributory funding model created organisational capacity to innovate, build relationships, respond to emergencies, and deliver mana-enhancing rather than transactional support. This funding also enables organisations to access other funding sources, as many philanthropic trusts require baseline funding before applications can be made. Flexible operational funding is central to enabling enhanced capability and responsiveness.

Lesson 3: Primary funding sustains essential national-level operations

For national partners (NZFN, AFRA, Kore Hiakai) where MSD is the primary funder, FSC funding sustains core functions that enable the entire three-tiered system to operate. This includes NZFN's national distribution model and rescue operations, which provide the foundation for large-scale food rescue and bulk purchasing that regional and local levels depend on; AFRA's convening and capability-building functions, which mature the food rescue sector through guidance, networking, and knowledge sharing; and Kore Hiakai's research and sector development work, which lifts capability through practice tools like the Aotearoa Standard Food Parcel Measure and evidence-based research validating provider experience. Without continued FSC funding, these essential national-level operations would cease, creating system-wide impacts as the infrastructure enabling regional and local operations would be lost. The interdependent nature of the system means national-level capacity is foundational to effectiveness at all levels.



Lesson 4: Capability building alongside infrastructure investment amplifies effectiveness

The evaluation found that investing in hard infrastructure alone would not have achieved the sector maturation and practice changes observed. AFRA's role in building food rescue capability through guidance, networking, and knowledge sharing, combined with Kore Hiakai's research and practice frameworks, created system-wide improvements in food safety, nutritional awareness, and culturally responsive practice. Capability building and infrastructure investment are complementary rather than alternative approaches. The combination creates more professional, effective operations than either approach alone would achieve.

Lesson 5: Outcomes-focused funding enables locally relevant innovation

Providers with strong community connections and adequate capacity developed diverse, locally-tailored solutions when given flexibility to innovate. The FSC funding model's focus on outcomes rather than prescriptive outputs enabled providers to test approaches, learn from results, and adapt models to suit specific contexts. Innovations that did not work could be discontinued without threatening core operations, while successful approaches could be scaled. Outcomes-focused funding combined with adequate organisational capacity enables responsive innovation that meets diverse community needs more effectively than standardised approaches.

Lesson 6: Food provision functions as gateway rather than endpoint, offering pathways to address underlying drivers of food insecurity

The evaluation found that when providers treat food as an entry point to address underlying drivers of food insecurity, this creates opportunities for broader household support than could be achieved by focusing solely on food distribution. FSC funding enabled providers to employ staff with assessment skills, spend time building trust, and connect households with services addressing debt, income support, housing, and other needs. Administrative data showed that 49% of households accessing food support were referred to other services within three months, indicating complex needs requiring integrated responses. Food provision models designed as gateways to broader support, combined with adequate capacity to build relationships and make effective referrals, can address underlying drivers rather than simply providing relief.

Lesson 7: Mana-enhancing delivery approaches affect household willingness to access support

The evaluation demonstrated that how food support is delivered affects household willingness to seek assistance and engage with broader supports. The shift from generic parcels to choice-based models, culturally appropriate food provision, and welcoming environments reduced stigma and shame. Providers emphasised that maintaining household mana and dignity was not simply about ethics but about effectiveness. Households are more likely to access support when needed and engage with services that can address underlying issues when approaches are mana-enhancing. This has implications for provider selection, staff training, and service design.



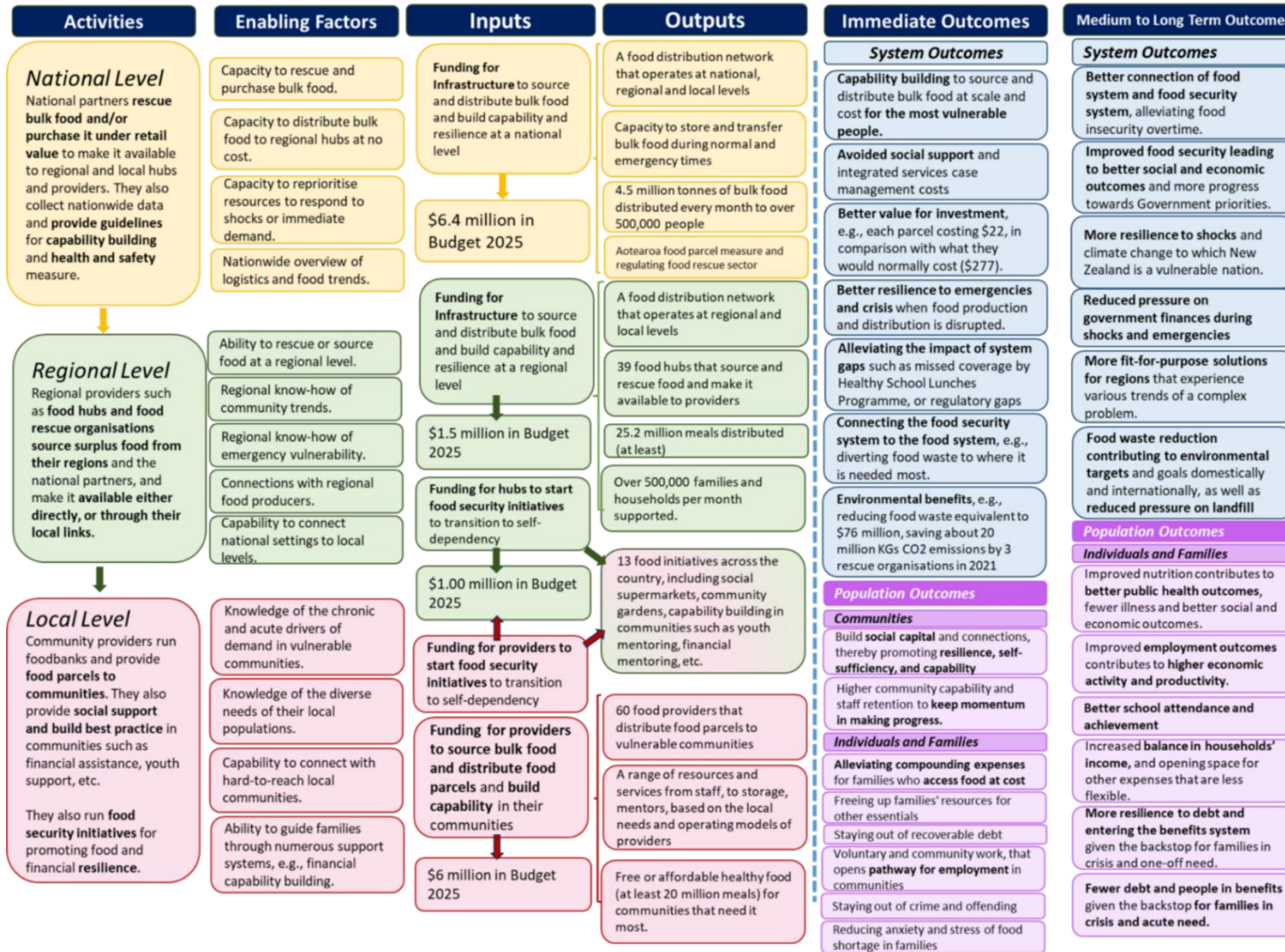
Lesson 8: Diverse provider networks improve reach to priority populations

The strategic development of the provider network through partnerships with Māori, Pacific, and other specialist providers improved reach to diverse communities. Providers with strong cultural connections brought knowledge about dietary preferences, cultural practices, and effective engagement approaches. For Māori, Pacific, and Ethnic Communities households, accessing support from providers who understood their cultural context created more appropriate and effective support. Provider network diversity support food security system effectiveness in reaching and appropriately serving diverse populations experiencing food insecurity.

Lesson 9: Emergency response capability requires sustained baseline capacity

The evaluation found that organisations' ability to provide rapid emergency response depended on maintaining baseline operational capacity during business-as-usual periods. The infrastructure, staffing, relationships, and institutional knowledge needed for emergency response cannot be built rapidly when crises occur but must be sustained over time. Organisations that had developed emergency response capability through FSC funding could pivot rapidly into response mode because the necessary capacity already existed. Emergency response capability is a function of sustained baseline investment rather than emergency-specific funding. This demonstrates that business-as-usual funding creates capacity that becomes critical during emergencies even if not utilised for this purpose most of the time.

Appendix A: FSC Theory of Change



Appendix B: Evaluation framework

KEQs	Criteria	Sub-questions	Data sources	Indicators of success
1. To what extent has the investment in national, regional, and local food distribution infrastructure and community food provision contributed to supporting households experiencing food insecurity?	Efficiency (optimising the speed and cost of sourcing, storing and distributing food)	<p>During both business-as-usual and emergency welfare response, how efficient has FSC investment in infrastructure (national, regional, local)⁷ and community food provision been in improving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the affordability of sourcing food and providing food support to households experiencing food insecurity? ○ the speed and reliability of food distribution? <p>How has FSC investment improved access to bulk food supplies (purchased and rescued) for hubs and providers?</p> <p>What impact has this had on the scale of food rescue that benefits food support?</p>	<p>Administrative data</p> <p>Key informant interviews with MSD and national partners</p> <p>National partner reporting</p> <p>Provider reporting and performance data</p> <p>Survey of FSC providers</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Investment has enabled regional food hubs and providers to reduce the average cost of food parcels through collective purchasing, shared logistics, or other efficiencies</p> <p>Investment has improved access to bulk food supplies (both purchased and rescued) for hubs and providers, enabling distribution at greater cost efficiency and scale</p> <p>Scale and reach of food distribution (tonnage, parcels, households supported) has increased</p> <p>Investment has improved speed and reliability of food distribution during both business-as-usual and emergency contexts</p> <p>There is reduced food wastage through improved coordination, logistics, and redistribution mechanisms</p>

⁷ Infrastructure includes both hard infrastructure (physical facilities, equipment, vehicles, storage) and soft infrastructure (systems, processes, coordination mechanisms, data platforms, capability building)



KEQs	Criteria	Sub-questions	Data sources	Indicators of success
	Effectiveness (capacity and capability to source, store, and distribute food that meets community needs)	<p>How has capability and capacity of the three-tiered infrastructure (national, regional, local) improved sourcing, storing, and distributing food at scale, both for business-as-usual and emergency contexts?</p> <p>How has the FSC investment supported improved speed and reliability of food distribution during business-as-usual and emergencies?</p> <p>How well has the funding and services been distributed across regions relative to need?</p>	<p>Administrative data</p> <p>Key informant interviews with MSD and national partners</p> <p>National partner reporting</p> <p>Provider reporting and performance data</p> <p>Survey of FSC providers</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Investment has strengthened social capital and connections within and between the national, regional and local levels of the food secure communities' ecosystem</p> <p>Investment has contributed to providers having a better understanding of effective practice and increased ability to apply it, supported by access to professional development resources.</p> <p>Scale and reach of food distributed through the infrastructure (national, regional, local) is proportionate to regional need</p> <p>The food security system demonstrates increased resilience, and ability to scale up, to address future emergencies and crises when food production and distribution is disrupted</p> <p>Food security system has been effectively connected to the food production system (e.g., food waste diversion, food rescue)</p> <p>FSC investment has contributed to the broader social development outcomes sought by MSD, such as alleviating the</p>



KEQs	Criteria	Sub-questions	Data sources	Indicators of success
				impacts of material hardship on families.
	Relevance (appropriateness of the investment approach and model for addressing food insecurity needs and gaps)	<p>During both business-as-usual and emergency welfare response, how relevant has FSC investment in infrastructure (national, regional, local) and community food provision been in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ addressing critical gaps in the food insecurity ecosystem? ○ aligning with community food security needs (both acute and chronic)? 	<p>Key informant interviews with MSD and national partners</p> <p>National partner reporting</p> <p>Provider reporting and performance data</p> <p>Survey of FSC providers</p> <p>Case studies</p>	<p>Investment has helped alleviate gaps not addressed by other initiatives such as the school lunches programme</p> <p>Regional food hubs and providers have the flexibility to lead initiatives that are proportionate to regional and local need</p> <p>The FSC investment model (national, regional, local approach) is relevant for addressing food insecurity in both business-as-usual and emergency welfare response contexts</p>
	Sustainability (ability of infrastructure and operations to continue beyond FSC investment)	<p>Are national and regional food hubs able to sustain their operations without FSC funding?</p> <p>What capacity, capability, and infrastructure would be lost if FSC funding is not sustained?</p>	This is an analytical question that will be addressed through a synthesis of data.	
2. How well has the programme supported households experiencing food insecurity?	Effectiveness (capacity and capability to meet the diverse needs of households experiencing food insecurity)	<p>What households benefit from support from food providers and in what circumstances?</p> <p>During both business-as-usual and emergency welfare response, how effective has FSC investment in</p>	<p>Administrative data</p> <p>Key informant interviews with MSD and national partners</p> <p>Survey of FSC providers</p>	<p>The FSC programme has contributed to providers' capacity and capability to identify and respond to the specific food security needs of households in their communities</p> <p>FSC programme has contributed to meeting the needs of different</p>



KEQs	Criteria	Sub-questions	Data sources	Indicators of success
		<p>infrastructure (national, regional, local) and community food provision been in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supporting households experiencing food insecurity across diverse circumstances (household types, geographic locations, cultural backgrounds)? ○ enabling flexible, place-based responses to household food insecurity? 	<p>Case studies (including emergency response example)</p> <p>National partner reporting</p> <p>Provider reporting</p>	<p>household types, including those most at risk of food insecurity including Māori, Pacific and single parent households</p> <p>Food provided meets the diverse needs of households including appropriate food types, cultural preferences, and nutritional requirements</p> <p>The FSC programme has enabled regional food hubs and providers to develop, trial and implement locally relevant solutions to household food insecurity, supporting increased self-reliance.</p> <p>Regional food hubs and providers have used multiple, integrated approaches to improve food security that meet the needs of their community (e.g., choosing, cooking, growing, sharing, buying, and connecting with kai; partnering around kai; social supermarket initiatives).</p>
	Efficacy (achievement of intended food security outcomes)	What changes in household food security and wellbeing has FSC programme support contributed to? What additional and unexpected outcomes have been achieved?	<p>Administrative data</p> <p>Key informant interviews with MSD and national partners</p>	<p>FSC programme has contributed to improved household food security, including better access to nutritious food</p> <p>Households have experienced reduced financial pressure due to</p>



KEQs	Criteria	Sub-questions	Data sources	Indicators of success
			<p>Survey of FSC providers</p> <p>Case studies (including emergency response examples)</p> <p>National partner reporting</p> <p>Provider reporting</p>	<p>accessing food at cost or receiving food parcels</p> <p>Households have experienced reduced food shortage-related anxiety and stress due to receiving food parcels</p> <p>Households have experienced additional benefits as a result of providers' enhanced capability and capacity, such as skills development, work readiness, progression towards stability. FSC programme has contributed to employment and skills development opportunities for community members</p>



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