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# INSIGHTS RELATED TO THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT DURING COVID-19

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These statements are a compilation of what we learnt from information collected through interviews to understand how lockdown was affecting whānau during Alert Level Four, an online survey that reached out to residents post-lockdown, and a review of emergency food providers. The statements represent how COVID-19 lockdown affected communities in the Hutt Valley as the food environment experienced dramatic change.



## QUALITY WHĀNAU TIME

Being at home meant people had more time to spend coming together as a family cooking, and eating. People valued this as they may not have usually spent that time together. Being at home all the time was challenging for whānau with vulnerable family members, and those with many people living in small homes. While some enjoyed a change in routine, extra time was not a luxury that essential workers experienced as they still had to balance family and work life.



## DAILY WHĀNAU ROUTINES

People found benefit in being able to form new routines by not having to rush at the end of the day, while some found themselves in a less structured routine compared to normal. Cooking at home and having input from the whole family meant mealtimes were a main part of the day and there was more of a routine created around them. Families enjoyed having more hands to help out in the kitchen and getting younger members involved to learn how to cook and bake.



## MEAL PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Having more time allowed for all meals to be planned and prepared. This meant that some people found they ate better food and had more efficient supermarket trips. Lockdown had a lasting effect on people's household by highlighting the issue of food waste. Many will continue to be more conscious of food waste and avoid it by planning meals and shopping lists.



## MEAL KIT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Meal kit subscriptions such as My Food Bag or Hello Fresh helped a lot of people to eat better during lockdown. They helped to make sure vegetables were being eaten, took the stress out of going to the supermarket and allowed children to cook by themselves more often. Some people have continued to use a meal kit subscription while others found it to be too expensive.



## HOME GARDENING

Growing fruit and vegetables was a source of good food for some people during lockdown. If there were ever to be another lockdown many people would like to have their own garden and perhaps chickens. Some are now taking better care of their existing vegetable gardens due to lockdown while others are planning a vegetable garden or are keen to start one so that they can become more self-sufficient.



## HOME COOKING

Having to cook at home all the time during lockdown allowed people to try new recipes, experiment more and spend time cooking more complex meals. People cooked and baked as something to do rather than something they had to do. Overall, people really wanted to continue home cooking after lockdown. People valued the new recipes, increased confidence and general goodness of home cooked food.

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## COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

General anxiety about the future increased for everyone, but especially for people already experiencing hardship prior to lockdown and the newly unemployed. Financial security, being warm for winter and having enough food were top of people's minds. Many people rose to the challenge of providing support to others during lockdown restrictions, including marae as well as formal and informal networks that exist within the community. At the same time the situation highlighted those who were unsupported and isolated. People doing food parcel deliveries saw the extent of poverty and hidden conditions in the community such as overcrowding.



## EATING GOOD FOOD

Many people found that they cooked healthier meals and ate more vegetables as a result of having more time. Frozen vegetables helped a lot of people eat good food during lockdown as fresh produce was expensive, or didn't last between visits to the supermarket. Social media and TV shows such as Nadia Lim's lockdown series helped people with recipe ideas and inspiration to cook. However, some people did find it challenging to come up with meal ideas and some got sick of cooking by the end of lockdown.



## TAKEAWAYS AND EATING OUT

Having no option to eat out or get takeaways helped many people to eat good food during lockdown and allowed reflection around the quality and price of takeaways. Some people realised that they didn't miss them and many hope to commit to eating fewer takeaways or even give them up completely.



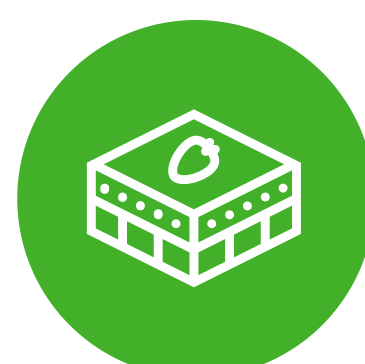
## SUPERMARKET SHOPPING

People found it hard to buy fruit and vegetables from the supermarkets as it was more expensive and of a lower quality compared to other options normally available. Larger, less frequent shops at the supermarket were more common. Some people found supermarket shopping stressful due to social distancing rules and long queues, so planning and timing of shopping trips became important. As a result of being in lockdown, some people plan to reduce the amount of times they go supermarket shopping.



## ONLINE ORDERING

Many people relied on online ordering of food to make use of click and collect or delivery. Local businesses who were offering delivery were appreciated, and people wanted more of these to be able to function. People went searching for alternative online delivery services as supermarket pick up and delivery slots filled fast. Some people have continued to order food online for delivery as it now fits better with their routine.



## SHORTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Nearly everyone experienced grocery items that were low in stock and purchasing limitations at the supermarket. This meant going without or finding alternatives to usual purchases. For people receiving online deliveries, many things were substituted or did not arrive with the order. This caused people to change the way they shop. Many worried about getting enough food for their family, especially when they couldn't afford to buy in bulk.



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## COST OF FOOD

People talked and became more aware about the cost of food within their households. Some people found they saved money during lockdown as a result of homemade lunches, no takeaways and putting more time into budgeting. This has meant that some people are now more conscious of money spent on food.



## FOOD BEHAVIOURS AND FEELINGS

When people couldn't share food in normal social or cultural settings during lockdown, they felt lonely and some felt isolated. Many missed sharing food and meals with family and friends and those who relied on this sharing felt frustrated and stressed. Being at home all the time in an uncertain situation made people crave comfort food and some felt guilty about the amount of baking and snacks they were consuming. Some people didn't mind not being able to share food and meals as they could relax from the pressure of having to go out and meet people.



## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Lockdown highlighted and exacerbated the existing hardship and inequities within the Hutt Valley. Compared to normal, people found it challenging to manage money with an increased demand for food at home, as well as higher prices due to less specials occurring at the supermarket. This meant they had to make smart choices as to what to buy to make money go further. Some people found it hard to balance this with choosing good food, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables. Additionally, food was not the only raised expense. Many households were in survival mode and needed support to pay for essentials such as rent, utilities, medicine and things to keep warm as it got colder.



## EMERGENCY FOOD DEMAND

Some people found it hard to access food during lockdown. For single parents it was harder to go grocery shopping as they couldn't take their children into the supermarket with them. Essential workers didn't have the luxury of having extra time to cook. The demand for emergency food was overwhelming. People in need were not only those who couldn't afford food, but also people who were physically unable to go shopping. There are still a large number of people needing support with access to food, even though restrictions have been lifted.



## STOCKING UP

Some people found it challenging to store the food they had stocked up with, especially keeping fruit and vegetables fresh between shops. If there were to be a lockdown in the future some people would stock up more, particularly on non-perishables and pantry staples. Lockdown has caused some people to continue to remain well stocked and look at expanding their emergency kits to be more useful in different situations.



## LITTLE TO NO CHANGE

People knew that staying at home was the right thing to do. Some people tried to keep life as normal as possible. While they knew others were in challenging situations, some people acknowledged they were okay during lockdown and were grateful for what they had. Many were concerned about the welfare of people in the community, especially when they often saw food parcel trucks delivering in their neighbourhood.