



## Plant and Food Research New Zealand

NGĀ ĀHUATANGA O TE TIRITI TOHU

MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION HIGHLY COMMENDED



**WATCH  
VIDEO**

### THE STORY

Hūtia te rito, kei hea te kōmako e kō? If you pluck out the heart of the harakeke plant, where will the bellbird sing?

This much loved whakataukī speaks about the youngest shoots that live in the centre of harakeke, protected by the older leaves. Without them, there is no future for the plant or the eco-system that relies on it. It reminds us of the role adults play in ensuring the success of future generations.

Plant and Food Research New Zealand is paying tribute to this philosophy with its Te Rito programme, by providing opportunities for rangatahi Māori to flourish in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Mātauranga Māori).

Since 2020, Te Rito has exposed more than 1,000 rangatahi to education and career pathways that weave science and mātauranga Māori together – an important integration considering the huge stores of indigenous knowledge in Aotearoa around te taiao and sustainable food practices.

“Māori are severely under-represented in the research, science and innovation workforce,” says principal advisor Te Aue Addison, an advisor and strategist with more than 10 years’ experience working in central government, local government and the private sector.

The programme offers a number of pathways, starting at year 10 right through to post-graduate students. They include outreach within schools, horticultural programmes,

cadetships and 12-week summer internships, which reserve 50 per cent of intake for taurira Māori.

By setting ambitious targets, providing wraparound support and catering for different learning styles, Te Rito is already starting to show promising results. Since 2019, Plant & Food Research has seen an increase from 22 to 42 Māori staff, with an additional eight post-graduate students on stipend within the organisation.

“This increase in Māori staff and post-graduate students at Plant and Food Research New Zealand has been significantly influenced by our Te Rito pathways,” says Te Aue.

The programme is a result of a co-design of initiatives between science staff supervisors working with the Māori Strategy, Partnerships & Enterprise Team for guidance.

It has also been informed by former Te Rito participants, who gifted Plant and Food Research New Zealand a set of values that were integrated into the organisation’s wider student recruitment approach. These include hāpono (being able to bring one’s authentic self to the work), manaakitanga (ensuring there is time and space to be engaged and connected), whakahono (ensuring the projects are meaningful to taurira) and angitū (enjoying success and feeling valued).

The initiative has required considerable investment from Plant and Food Research New Zealand, and its delivery spans all levels of the organisation, from science staff to IT, HR and other business service teams who help coordinate logistics for the taurira.

However the organisation sees it as an important obligation, says Te Aue.

“The programme contributes to the wellbeing of all who engage in the different pathways. It creates opportunities for Māori staff to authentically express themselves, as well as for our non-Māori staff to experience the value that rangatahi Māori contribute to the workplace.”

“We’re supporting Māori economic development through job creation, which in turn contributes to their whānau wellbeing and economic prosperity.”

## THE CHALLENGE

To give rangatahi Māori exposure to meaningful careers in research and innovation by unlocking the potential of mātauranga Māori and science through research.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Plant and Food Research New Zealand’s broader summer studentship programme reserves up to 50% of the total intake for taurira Māori under the Te Rito Summer Internship
- The approach is grounded in te ao Māori with a co-design of initiatives between science staff supervisors working with the Māori Strategy, Partnerships & Enterprise Team for guidance
- Embedding te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori throughout Te Rito Pathways initiatives in a manner that is authentic, respectful and equips rangatahi and taurira Māori to feel culturally safe

**“Hūtia te rito, kei hea te kōmako e kō? If you pluck out the heart of the harakeke plant, where will the bellbird sing?”**

- Leadership and development for rangatahi Māori including travel and attendance to an annual three-day student leadership conference held at Te Mahurehure marae, Auckland
- All cadetship, tertiary internship and post-graduate students are paid. This covers student stipend/salaries throughout their placement paid by Plant & Food Research.
- Over 70 Plant and Food Research New Zealand staff are involved in Te Rito Pathway initiatives
- Partnerships with other Crown Research Institutes to place rangatahi within their organisations
- Partnerships with Pūhoro STEMM Academy, most major universities, Toi Kai Rawa and Māori research partners



## RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Plant and Food Research New Zealand has increased from 22 Māori staff to 42 Māori staff or 4.7% of its total workforce (900) since 2019
- Eight Māori post-graduate students are on stipend with the organisation
- Rangatahi thrive in their Māori identity in the workplace
- Rangatahi help shape the future research horizon working with taonga and mātauranga Māori
- The programme supports Māori economic development through job creation for Te Rito rangatahi, taura and Māori researchers, which contributes to their whānau wellbeing and economic prosperity
- Non-Māori staff experience the value that rangatahi and taura Māori contribute to the workplace
- Plant and Food Research New Zealand is better able to navigate the New Zealand landscape of IP ownership, Waitangi claims and mātauranga Māori.

## KEY LEARNING

Investment in STEMM learning pathways for rangatahi Māori contributes to growth and wellbeing at all levels of an organisation and the wider industry.

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AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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