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A plan exists for a fairer and healthier food system. Which party policies align best?

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Aotearoa New Zealand produces enough food annually to feed 40 million people – most of it exported. Yet it is estimated one in three households experience some form of hunger or food insecurity.

In general, food insecurity describes the hard financial choices some people have to make between paying for housing, energy, transport or food. It can mean families skipping meals, parents going without so children can eat, and children whose only meal might be a school-provided lunch.

The problem has been exacerbated by soaring food prices caused by global disruption of supply chains and rising fuel costs. Climate change and extreme weather events can exacerbate the problem.

Meanwhile, household incomes have stagnated relative to inflation. The availability and consumption of ultra-processed foods grows, and with it the impact of diet-related disease.

While these problems are often reported and analysed individually, cumulatively they contribute to a bigger picture of food security that deserves greater scrutiny.

In 2023, the Public Health Advisory Committee was tasked by the then Labour-led government to investigate the national food system. The committee's Rebalancing Our Food System report put forward five key recommendations:

1. develop a unified food system for all New Zealanders

- 2. ensure local parts of the food system meet the needs and aspirations of those communities
- 3. central and local governments use legislation, policy and regulation levers to create and foster healthy food environments for all New Zealanders
- 4. address food insecurity through coordinated support and community-level food access initiatives
- 5. ensure the work of transforming the food system is accompanied by a programme of data collection, research, monitoring and surveillance.

The report, presented to the current government in May 2024, offered a framework to build a more equitable and healthier food system.

With the general election due, we reviewed the positions of the six political parties elected to parliament in 2023 (hence the absence of the Opportunity Party in our analysis), relative to the committee’s five recommendations.

These positions were evaluated using each party’s own websites and press releases, along with media statements. The table below provides an overview of what we found.

Te Pāti Māori	Aligned	Aligned	Aligned	Aligned	Partial
NZ First	Partial	Not Aligned	Aligned	Partial	Not Aligned
ACT	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Partial
Green Party	Aligned	Aligned	Aligned	Aligned	Partial
Labour	Partial	Aligned	Partial	Aligned	Partial
National	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Not Aligned	Partial	Partial
	National Food Strategy	Māori & Community Leadership	Healthy Food Environments	Food Security & Social Policy	Data, Evidence & Monitoring

How the parties elected in 2023 align with the Public Health Advisory Committee’s 5-point plan.
Rudraksh Kalose, CC BY-NC-SA

National

National has no specific food policy.

As part of a coalition agreement with ACT in 2024, it agreed to cut up to NZ\$145 million from the Ka Ora, Ka Ako school lunch budget.

However, \$38 million over four years is budgeted for the Food Secure Communities and Kickstart Breakfast scheme.

National’s response to increased food prices focuses on the structural separation of the Foodstuffs supermarket chains.

Labour

Labour’s policy platform focuses more on costs and social protection than on a holistic food system.

It introduced the now disestablished [Te Aka Whai Ora](#) (Māori Health Authority) which took an integrated approach towards Māori health that included aspects of food sovereignty.

Labour has pledged to bring back the original Ka Ora, Ka Ako school lunches model, and to crack down on [grocery price gouging](#) by separating wholesale supply businesses from supermarket retailers.

Read more: [Election Policy Tracker: your guide to what the parties are promising during the 2026 election campaign](#)

New Zealand First

New Zealand First has no specific food policy, but the party acknowledges food affordability is a part of the cost-of-living crisis. The party's [three-pronged approach](#) to supermarket intervention is its most visible position on food systems.

The party also noted in its [coalition report](#) that it had abolished Te Aka Whai Ora as part of the coalition agreement with National and ACT.

Green Party

The Green Party's [manifesto](#) contains a comprehensive and detailed [food policy](#) which aligns most closely with the Public Health Advisory Committee's cohesive food strategy.

Its [health policy](#) also promises to "increase the affordability of healthy foods and restrict the marketing, distribution and affordability of unhealthy and processed foods and beverages".

The party is campaigning on a strategy for [lowering food prices](#), including the establishment of a government-owned supermarket chain to drive competition.

The party supports increased food security with a detailed "[reforming the food system](#)" plan that includes an expanded [free school lunch service](#).

ACT

ACT's [constitutional values](#) are ideologically opposite to active government intervention in food environments.

The party led the reduction of the Ka Ora, Ka Ako budget, with plans to further reduce it in 2027. It also led the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora, stating the authority operated in opposition to the party's "[one law for all](#)" policy.

Although ACT acknowledges grocery prices are too high, it has argued that breaking up the supermarket duopoly is [unethical and likely to harm](#) only New Zealand-owned Foodstuffs.

The party supports food producers as an industry, but does not emphasise reform to the food system.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori's constitution doesn't directly address food initiatives, but specific policies are strongly aligned with the Public Health Advisory Committee's framework.

These include Māori-centred food sovereignty, affordable food and climate resilience.

The party is campaigning for a Māori education authority to expand school lunches, and a tax plan with targeted credits "equivalent to eight weeks of kai [food]" aimed at encouraging holistic Māori wellbeing.

Making food an issue

The Public Health Advisory Committee report was framed as an opportunity to address some of the challenges facing the national food system.

It was based on the premise that access to food is a basic human right and an equitable food system will see better health outcomes.

However, there is little political consensus on what a fair and healthy food system should actually look like. Party political ideologies variously favour market-driven, interventionist, preventative or reactive strategies.

With the election weeks away, voters have the opportunity to decide which aisle they're standing in and which political brand they are buying.



From the cost of living and a health system under extreme pressure to how best to tackle climate change, the coming election involves some big choices.

This article is part of The Conversation's [Election 2026 series](#); expert analysis of the major policy debates and the big challenges New Zealand's next government will face.

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