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A ground-breaking collaboration aims to get more Maori youth back farming their own land.

Te Arawa hapu Ngati Pikiāo, education institution Te Wananga o Aotearoa ki Waiariki and Masterton-based agricultural training group the Taratahi Training Centre have joined forces to ensure future generations gain the education necessary to own and run iwi farming interests.

Te Wananga o Aotearoa ki Waiariki regional manager Neville King said about 20 per cent of New Zealand was Maori-owned land but Maori were seriously under-represented in the agricultural sector.

Mr King said the group wanted to develop a project aimed at using the success of Te Wananga o Aotearoa in Maori education and the Taratahi Training Centre's agricultural training excellence to build a solid platform for Ngati Pikiāo land trusts and farming interests.

"The project is exciting and the possibilities endless ... building participation and success for Maori learners in under-represented areas of tertiary education is the key focus for the collaboration," he said.

On Friday last week, representatives of the three groups met in Rotorua to sign a "heads of agreement" memorandum to set the project in motion.

Details of the training programme are yet to be determined but students could be expected to participate in a one to three-year programme beginning in 2012.

Ngati Pikiāo kaumatua Putu Mihaka said he was pleased the hapu had been asked to contribute to the programme and its syllabus.

He said Nga Ringa Raupa o Pikiāo, a collective of three Maori land trusts - Tautara Matawhaura, Pukahukiwi and Waerenga - hoped to attract and train members of their hapu to operate, manage and direct their assets, starting with agriculture and moving into other sectors as they progressed.

Mr King said it was the start of a new era in tertiary education.

"Instead of us saying 'we have a new course and it's the bee's knees' we are asking what is it the people want and what is the best way to further their education."

He said each institution would learn from each other and redistribute valuable knowledge.

"Right now we don't do agriculture and that's why we want to engage in this process and get our people back on the land."