



In Touch.

Hello! Kia ora!

Welcome to the April 2023 edition of In Touch, the monthly newsletter of A Lighter Touch Programme.

The In Touch newsletter is dedicated to keeping you updated on the programme's progress on agroecology crop protection here in Aotearoa.

This month we're sharing more of the fascinating projects that form part of A Lighter Touch Programme, including trials of native predators to control insect pests in greenhouse tomatoes and the use of annual flowers as part of a pest management system on vegetable farms.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the projects underway as part of A Lighter Touch.

30 April 2023

This update includes:

- **A word from the ISAG Chair**
- **Native predators being trialled in greenhouse tomatoes**
- **A blooming approach to pest management**
- **Australian expert shares IPM knowledge**
- **A Lighter Touch – the shorthand guide**
- **PGG visit to Pukekohe Demonstration Farm**
- **Sharing more of A Lighter Touch**
- **Upcoming events**



A Word From the ISAG Chair

As A Lighter Touch reaches the halfway point of its seven-year term, a big focus is now on delivering enduring outcomes and considering what happens beyond the life of the programme.

Industry Stakeholder Advisory Group chair Stuart Davis says the 15 product groups who partner in the programme are committed to ensuring it delivers by providing new crop protection tools, resources, knowledge and case studies to support growers moving to a lighter touch in crop pest and disease management.

"The journey to agroecological crop protection doesn't stop in 2027 when the ALT programme is set to end, so we need to consider how we build on what we've started and where we take it next."

Stuart says the strength of the programme is in everyone working together, the collaboration across all plant food producers. "It's a long way from where we started, which was with a whole lot of ad hoc work done by various groups, with little co-ordination or continuity."

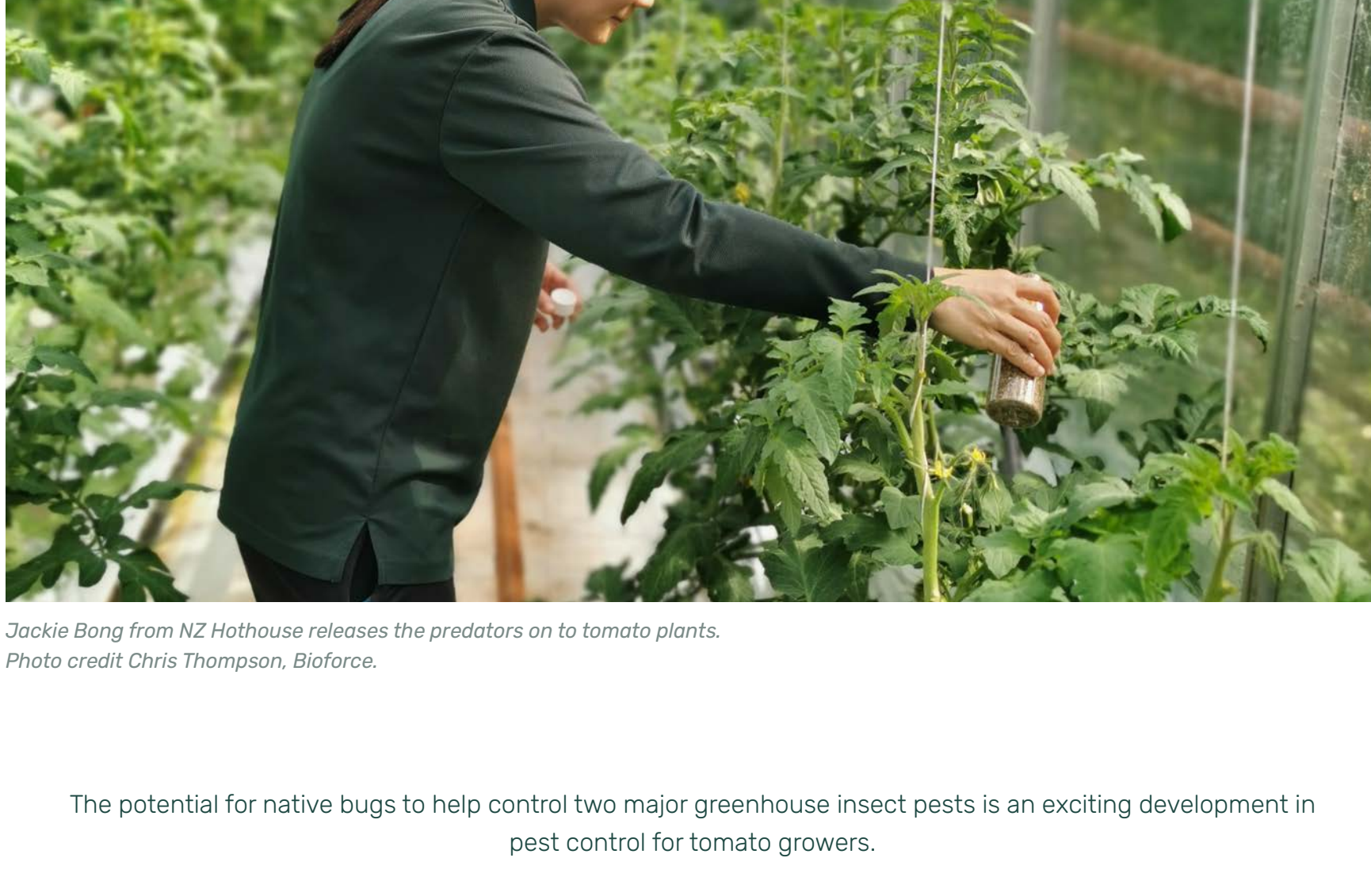


We now have an industry forum focused on moving us from agrichemical pest management to an agroecological future, we've established that collegiality. It puts us in a strong position to continue to adapt to meet the future demands of customers, and further strengthen the reputation of New Zealand food."

STUART DAVIS – ISAG CHAIR

Project Overview

Native predators being trialled in greenhouse tomatoes

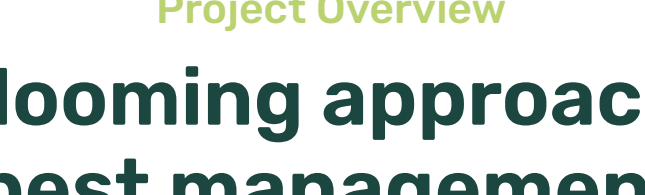


Jackie Bong from NZ Hothouse releases the predators on to tomato plants. Photo credit Chris Thompson, Bioforce.

The potential for native bugs to help control two major greenhouse insect pests is an exciting development in pest control for tomato growers.

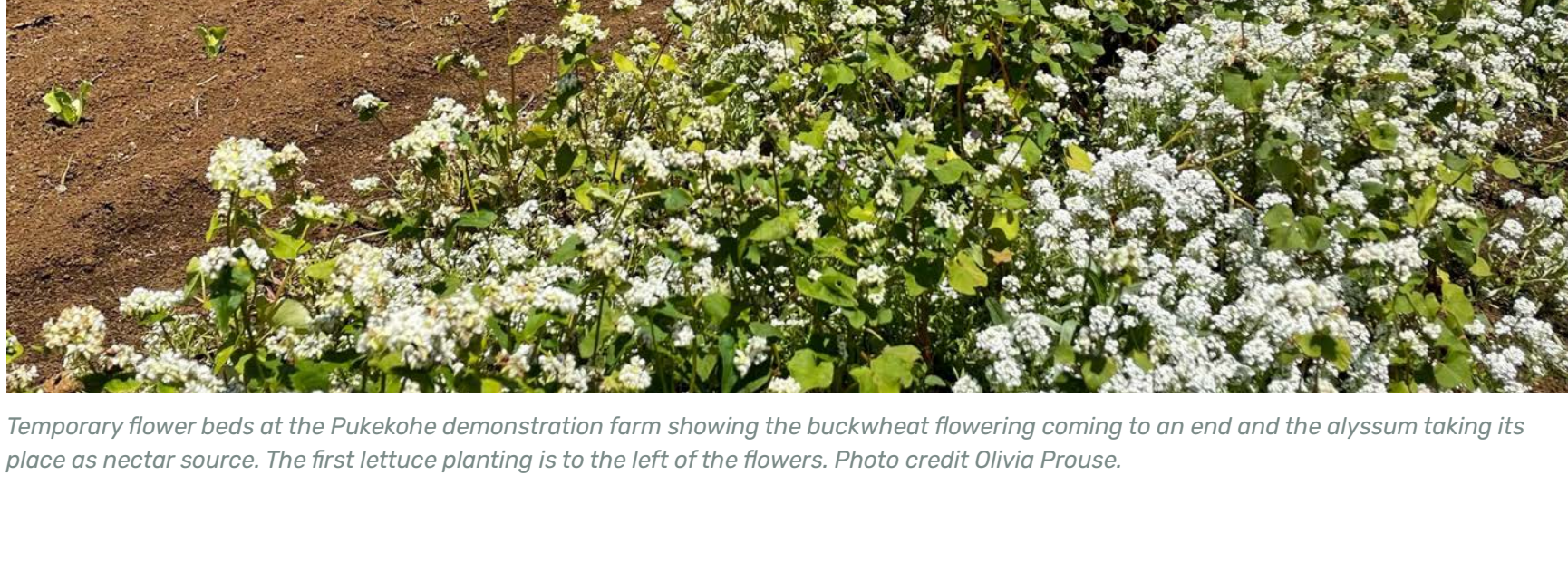
A Tomatoes New Zealand project in conjunction with A Lighter Touch is aiming to change the face of crop management of greenhouse tomatoes, with a move to a more balanced approach. The ultimate goal is to reduce agrichemical applications on tomatoes and instead use a combination of predators, soft sprays and selective agrichemicals.

Previous research in the laboratory has identified some native arthropods, or bugs, as potential predators of Greenhouse whitefly and Tomato potato psyllid, the two major economic insect pests for greenhouse growers. Greenhouse trials are underway, with encouraging early observations. **Find out more here.**



Project Overview

A blooming approach to pest management



Temporary flower beds at the Pukekohe demonstration farm showing the buckwheat flowering coming to an end and the alyssum taking its place as nectar source. The first lettuce planting is to the left of the flowers. Photo credit Olivia Prouse.

Rows of blooming flowers may seem like unusual bedfellows for vegetable crops, but a project in Pukekohe is demonstrating they can be an effective tool in a grower's pest management system.

A Vegetables NZ project with A Lighter Touch has seen single beds of cornflower, alyssum and buckwheat planted alongside vegetable crops at the Pukekohe demonstration farm. It is designed to show manipulation of plant diversity on a farm can increase beneficial insect numbers and reduce the pests in a crop, meaning less use of insecticides is required.

It's also working through the practicalities of how incorporating beneficial insect attracting plants works in a cropping farm system. The aim is to provide growers with a resource demonstrating how they can increase biodiversity to provide a source of shelter, nectar, alternative food and pollen (SNAP) to attract and retain beneficial insects. **Learn more here.**



Project Overview

Australian expert shares IPM knowledge

Enhancing crop protection through beneficial insects and changes to physical on-farm practices were discussion points of a recent visit by integrated pest management (IPM) expert Dr Paul Horne.

A well-respected Australian entomologist, Paul Horne's visit to New Zealand in March was sponsored by Potatoes NZ and Onsite. It included grower events in Canterbury and Pukekohe as well as a quick visit to the Pukekohe demonstration farm, an Onions NZ, Vegetables NZ- A Lighter Touch extension tool.

Paul spoke about the importance of targeted chemical use, given the negative impact insecticides and some fungicides can have on insects beneficial to crops. He discussed what growers could do to help build and maintain those beneficial insects, in and around a crop, in order to use them as effectively as possible, for as long as possible. **Read more here.**

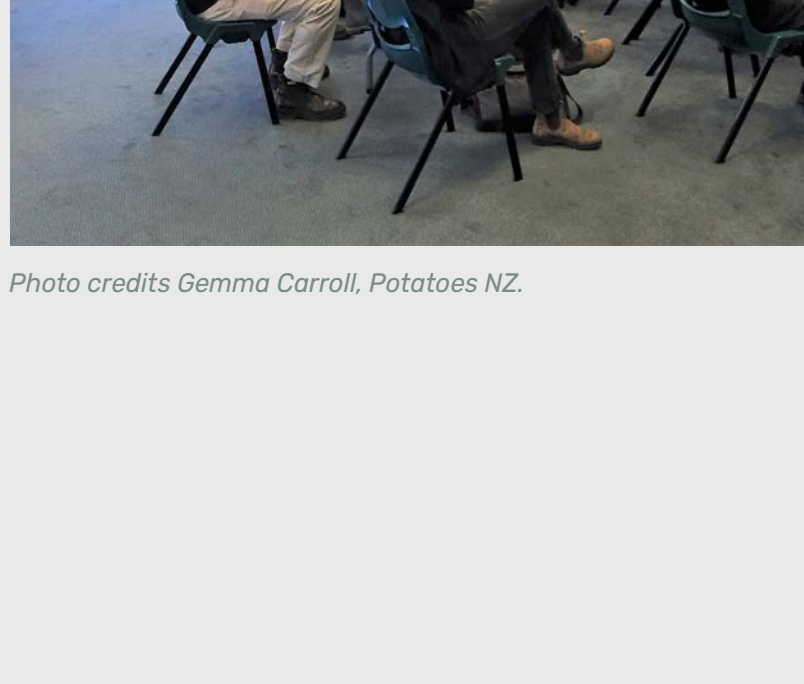


Photo credits Gemma Carroll, Potatoes NZ.

A Lighter Touch – the shorthand guide

ISAG, PGG, SFFF, MPI, IPM, PRM, BCA – is this making sense, or have we lost you already?

As with any sector or organisation, there's no shortage of acronyms and abbreviations used when A Lighter Touch work is being discussed. But when you're not directly involved on a day-to-day basis, it can be hard to get a handle on all the moving pieces and exactly how it works. **This article** is a shorthand guide. ALT101 if you like.

Update

PGG visit to Pukekohe demonstration farm



Photo credit Damien Cullinan.

A Lighter Touch Programme Governance Group members took the opportunity while meeting last month in Pukekohe to visit the demonstration farm and learn more about the ALT projects Onions NZ and Vegetables NZ have underway there. Pictured viewing the biodiverse planting first-hand (from L-R) are ALT programme director Livia Esterhazy, Howe Young of Baile Brothers, PGG chair Dave Tanner and ISAG chair Stuart Davis.



Sharing more of A Lighter Touch

A key component of A Lighter Touch is not only helping find new methods of crop protection, it's also about sharing that knowledge and supporting growers to move to an agroecological future.

Our website, www.a-lighter-touch.co.nz is an important tool in telling the A Lighter Touch story, and it's just had a refresh. You'll find a new section focusing on ALT projects, with images and videos, as well as programme resources. And you can expect the volume of content to just keep growing over the remaining four years of the programme.

We're keen to spread the word that moving to A Lighter Touch is the way of the future for plant-based food production, so go check out the changes and let us know what you think.

What's coming up

Get involved with these upcoming events:

- **The Big Check-In** 4 May 2023 – an online evening of support for rural people post-cyclone.
- **Pukekohe Young Grower Competition** 19 May 2023
- **Central Otago Young Grower Competition** 26 May 2023
- **Hort Connections** 5-7 June 2023
- **Summerfruit Conference** 7-8 June 2023
- **Field days 14-17** June 2023
- **Horticulture Conference Week** 31 July-4 Aug 2023

Contact

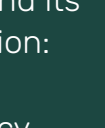
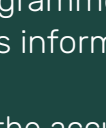
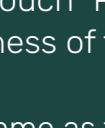
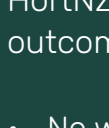
Getting involved

To find out more about a A Lighter Touch or work that is specific to your crop, please contact your industry body group. There are projects under way nationwide.

For extra information about any of the articles above, **email us here at news@a-lighter-touch.co.nz**

SUBSCRIBE to In Touch

Please forward this on to other future-focussed growers and producers.



- No warranty is given by HortNZ or any other party to involve in the "A Lighter Touch" Programme as to the accuracy, completeness, currency or reliability of the information.
- Readers should make their own enquiries and seek advice from suitably qualified people before acting on this information.
- HortNZ disclaims all liability to any person in relation to the information contained in this publication.

Our mailing address is: