



PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY TO MARCH 2024

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Quarter 4 brings with it the end of Year Four of the A Lighter Touch Programme. It has been an exciting year with a significant increase in communication and stakeholder engagement as well as growers having access to project outcomes that are adding to their pest and disease management toolbox – not only increasing their ability to manage crop and pests with a lighter environmental touch but equally building resilience into their businesses for continued market access as global regulations evolve and finally having positive impacts on their bottom lines.

Achievements for this period include:



- **Growing knowledge on how to benefit from biodiversity on cropping farms:** About 65 growers, advisors, agronomists and industry representatives attended the ALT educational forum focused on biodiversity in a cropping farm environment, either in-person or online. Held at the Pukekohe demonstration farm late March, five guest speakers discussed the topic from many different angles. The field visits in the afternoon saw attendees learn more about the different components of the biodiversity project at the demo farm. Resources from the day, are available on the biodiversity project webpage of the ALT website [here](#).

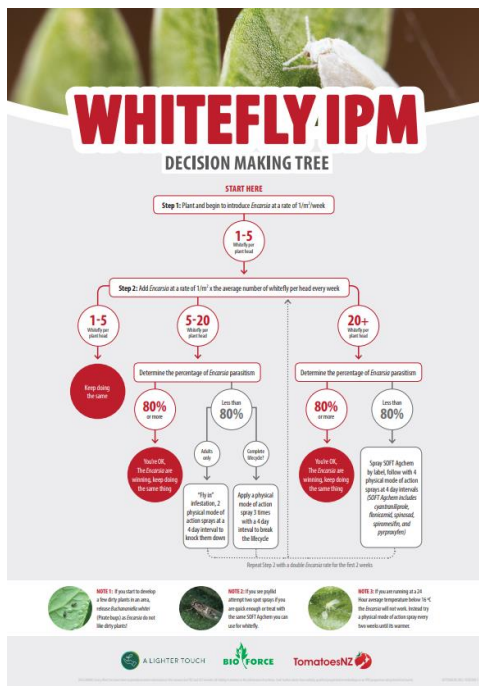
- **Increasing the tools for Brassica crops:** A newly approved ALT project will see a new-to-New Zealand bioinsecticide for the control of diamondback moth, a priority pest in brassica crops, taken through the regulatory pathway with the goal of achieving registration. Co-investors in the project are Vegetables New Zealand and crop protection partner Key Industries. This project connects the dots between the crop protection and crop production industries and government to partner in a project testing the regulatory pathway for novel biopesticides in New Zealand.
- **Finding solutions to help sweet corn crops:** A project investigating alternative crop protection control for green vegetable bug which can cause significant damage in fresh market and processed sweet corn crops has been approved this quarter. Currently, only one crop protection product is registered for the control of green vegetable bug, an organophosphate scheduled to be phased out after the current season. With no current alternatives that provide adequate control, this creates a high priority crop protection control gap in sweet corn. The project also aligns with the ALT 'Move the Needle' strategy, a prioritisation approach to ensure that new projects 'move the needle' towards delivering ALT's purpose of 'a lighter touch' before the current programme ends in 2027.
- **Transferring knowledge to farmers on how to start a shift to agroecological approaches with a win for broccoli:** A series of eight workshops were held on the Pukekohe Demonstration farm, Cronin Rd with about 30 growers and advisors attending each session, either in person or online. The workshops focussed on crop monitoring, how to inspect a crop for pest and disease, and identification of beneficial species. After eight weeks there was a successful harvest of a summer broccoli crop, using 60 percent biological controls, and fewer spray applications than were applied to a comparable commercial crop.

- Collaboration across sectors in action:** Collaboration between the arable and fresh and process vegetable sectors have been a key outcome for the quarter. Programme partners have identified that it makes more sense to work together than as individuals when product groups have grower-focused knowledge to share. Arable and vegetable growers have had opportunities to attend the FAR and Process Vegetables biologicals field day, Vegetable NZ (VNZI) Roadshows where results from ALT and other VNZI projects were shared and FAR hosted integrated pest management (IPM) expert Dr Paul Horne at a series of grower events, with support from A Lighter Touch.



Attendees at a combined FAR and Process Vegetables biologicals field day at FAR's trial site in Chertsey, Mid-Canterbury. Credit: FAR

- Launching ALT's podcast to continue to educate beyond local forums:** ALT's first podcast has been launched. First episodes are a three-part miniseries drawing on the expertise shared by the four panellists who presented at the ALT educational webinar *Strategies to encourage grower adoption of new technologies*. Further episodes will be added as more content is produced. The podcast and other extension resources are available [here](#) and it is also available on Spotify, Apple Music and other podcast platforms via Acast.



- Supporting tomatoes shifting from reliance on agrichemicals to using natural predators in their greenhouses:** First season results from a Tomatoes NZ (TNZ) and ALT project demonstrating the biological control of two major greenhouse pests show greater suppression of pest population using natural predators than with a full chemical approach. The project demonstrated that an entire season of greenhouse whitefly (GHW) control can be achieved through the use of two biological control agents (BCAs), *Encarsia formosa* and *Engyptatus nicotinae*. [Resources](#) have been developed for growers that explain what to do, and not to do, at a practical level and are being shared through workshops hosted by TNZ.

Whitefly IPM decision making tree resource developed from the Tomatoes NZ and ALT project demonstrating the biological control of two major greenhouse pests

Investment period contribution	Co-investor contribution	MPI	Total investment
During this Quarter	\$ 718,613	\$ 527,021	\$ 1,245,634
Programme to date	\$ 8,680,390	\$ 5,340,523	\$ 14,020,913