PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY TO MARCH 2025

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As ALT reaches the end of its fifth year, the programme is seeing no slowdown in the sharing of project results and interest from growers. The remaining two years of the programme will see further collaboration, accelerated delivery and more knowledge sharing to create behaviour change in the horticulture, arable and viticulture sectors towards crop protection with a lighter environmental touch.

Achievements for this period include:



Citrus New Zealand board member and grower Matt Carter inspects the understory planting established as part of an ALT project demonstrated in Gisborne citrus orchards.

Citrus NZ sees A Lighter Touch investment bearing fruit – Citrus New Zealand is seeing knowledge from the demonstration project being applied to growers on orchard. Citrus New Zealand board member Matt Carter, says he is seeing more and more growers choosing to sow the same or similar understory seed mix to that used in the project when they are planting or replanting a block. Read the full article here and find the project resources here.

Winter lettuce crop focus of new case study - Following on from an earlier case study resource detailing the management of a spring lettuce crop utilising IPM and biodiversity as key strategies, the latest case study focuses on a winter lettuce crop. It has been produced from knowledge gathered from projects at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm. A partnership between ALT, VNZI and Onions NZ, the farm is demonstrating how increasing biodiversity on vegetable farms can result in more beneficial insects, fewer insect pests in crops and less insecticides required. Read more here.



The Canterbury pea trial in mid-February, about two weeks away from harvest. Credit: Nigel Rowe-Lucas.

Biologicals show promise in peas and bean trials - Two seasons of field trials evaluating biological controls in two process vegetable crops have revealed promising results but also highlight the need for further research to ground-truth the findings for growers. The project aims to identify bio-fungicides and stimulants which are effective against two of the key diseases, fusarium and sclerotinia, in peas and dwarf beans. The first two seasons of trials for the project showed a promising level of control of the two diseases targeted. However, efficacy of some of the biological products varied due to differences in disease pressure. The further two seasons of trials will also generate data for application timing of these products. Read more here.

Growers benefit from ALT-VICE collaboration - The value of collaboration was highlighted to growers by the success of the Vegetables Big Day Out in February, held at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm, and hosted by VICE, with participation from ALT, Plant and Food Research and various vegetable product groups. The two-day event attracted more than 200 growers and industry attendees, and featured projects from ALT, VICE and other content of sector interest. Read more.



Attendees at the Vegetable Big Day Out inspecting insect life in a mobile insectary, a component of the A Lighter Touch biodiversity project. Image: VICE.

NZ on right path to increase use of biologicals - ALT Programme Manager Sarah Sorensen presented at the inaugural Brisbane Biologicals Summit. The clear message from the summit was that increasing grower uptake of biological crop protection products will require industry collaboration, regulatory change, and more education about their use – all focus areas for ALT. Read the full article here.



The barrier of bare ground between the trap crop and the sweet corn essentially removes the "green bridge" that the pest uses to migrate into the crop. Credit: Olivia Prouse.

Trap crop trialled as part of IPM solution - A project at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm is trialling the use of a trap crop as part of an integrated pest management (IPM) approach to controlling green vegetable bug (GVB) in sweet corn. The only products registered for the control of GVB in New Zealand were broad-spectrum pesticides which have since been phased out of use by regulators making finding an alternative a priority for the vegetable industry. Trap cropping is a practice that has the potential to be part of that solution. The trap crop will be monitored through the project to determine if it is achieving the objective of controlling the GVB and keeping it out of the sweet corn crop. Read more here.

Promising results in bacterial disease work - First steps in a project investigating potential controls for bacterial diseases has identified several organic compounds showing promising early-stage results. Bacterial diseases in horticulture pose a significant threat, and current control methods rely on antibiotics and copper, which are not sustainable long-term, and resistance development is an ever-present threat. The work by Waikato University and Plant & Food Research, and funded as a pan-sector project by all ALT product group partners, is an extension of initial work by Zespri and is an example of an area of work that likely would not have arisen without the collaboration amongst product groups in the ALT programme. Read more **here**.

New Grower resources available - Two new resources are providing growers with advice and guidance around carrying out visual soil assessments, and interpreting soil test results and a quick identification guide to plant species for understory planting. The resources have been generated as part of the ALT -Summerfruit NZ project which aims to establish understory planting in summerfruit orchards to enhance the abundance of beneficial insects. In addition, ALT has produced a resource discussing the science behind using biodiversity as part of a pest management strategy. Authored by Dr Charles (Merf) Merfield, the **report** explains what biodiversity is, how it supports pest management on farm, orchard and vineyard, and how it links to concepts such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM), biological control and agroecology.



Biodiversity and how it supports pest management is the focus of a new A Lighter Touch resource.

Collaboration amongst research programmes - Two programmes focused on growing knowledge of economic and environmental benefits from on-farm biodiversity are pooling their resources to gain maximum benefit for growers. ALT, which has three biodiversity projects with its product group partners, has teamed up with another Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures (SFFF) project Biodiversity for Beneficial Insects (B4BI) to identify how their programmes can have the most impact in terms of grower adoption. This type of collaboration will create the opportunity to impact grower adoption in a co-ordinated way. Read more **here**.

Investment period contribution	Co-investor contribution	MPI	Total investment
During this Quarter	$974,076	$627,853	$1,601,929
Programme to Date	$12,045,312	$7,294,236	$19,339,548