PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD APRIL TO JUNE 2025

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As ALT progresses through its sixth year, momentum continues to build with strong grower engagement and the delivery of impactful project outcomes. Highlights this quarter include tackling barriers to biological pest management, launching a two-part podcast on conservation biocontrol, and targeting crop protection gaps across sectors. Research into sustainable bacterial disease controls is showing promise, and new working groups are driving action on pesticide resistance. Collaboration with Australian growers is reinforcing ALT's integrated approach as the programme heads into its final two years.

Achievements for this period include:

Barriers prevent promotion of biological pest management – A survey undertaken by ALT found that there are numerous barriers preventing advisors recommending biological and ecological pest management practices to growers. The barriers identified by advisors ranged from a lack of available products and concerns about efficacy to a lack of willingness from growers to change, and the complexity of integrating biologicals into crop protection programmes. It is issues like these the biologicals awareness and extension project is designed to address. Read more **here**.



Scouting the crop for both beneficials and pest insects is a vital component of using biodiversity to support pest management.

New A Lighter Touch podcast series – The focus of the two new episodes is "what if your orchard could fight its own pests naturally?". The podcast takes a deep dive into the concept of conservation biocontrol and shares knowledge from the A Lighter Touch biodiversity project modelled in two citrus orchards. Listen to this two-part series linked on the **podcast page** of the A Lighter Touch website. It's also available on Spotify, Apple Music and other podcast platforms via Acast.

Targeting common crop protection gaps - Sustainable crop protection solutions that will potentially benefit multiple A Lighter Touch sectors will be the focus of trials being planned for the forthcoming growing season. In May, ALT hosted its sixth annual crop protection gaps workshop involving representatives from all 13 product group partners. The workshop is designed to help product groups identify their most significant crop protection issues and prioritise them in terms of importance to their sector. The focus of the 2025 workshop was on getting the maximum benefit from the remaining time left in the ALT programme, identifying solutions for common gaps. Read the full article **here**.

Promising results in bacterial disease work – The first steps in a project identifying potential controls for bacterial diseases has identified several organic compounds showing promising early-stage results. Bacterial diseases in horticulture pose a significant threat, causing substantial yield losses, economic damage, and impacting crop production. Current control methods rely on antibiotics and copper, which are not sustainable long-term, and resistance development is an ever-present threat. This is expanding from a project with Zespri and the aim of this project is to ultimately reduce the use of copper and bactericides in New Zealand horticulture by creating new, more sustainable control options. Read more **here**.

Trans-Tasman knowledge sharing to benefit growers – A Lighter Touch programme manager Sarah Sorensen, attended the Vegetables New Zealand Brisbane Tour of Learning in June. Along with three large growing operations, the tour also visited the Gatton Smart Farm, a $9 million Queensland Government and Hort Innovation initiative to drive agtech adoption across supply chains by transforming the Gatton Research facility into a world-class Smart Farm for horticulture. "Like us, the Australian horticulture industry is wanting to move towards a more integrated approach to crop protection, and this provides vast opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration between our industries," Sarah says. It was pleasing to see that the way A Lighter Touch has structured the programme's demonstration sites mirrors the approach being taken in Australia. Read more here.



The ecorobotix ARA, ultra-high precision robotic weed sprayer at Gatton Smart Farm, a demonstration site in Queensland. Credit: Sarah Sorensen.



Attendees at the ALT Pesticide Resistance Management Workshop in Wellington

A Lighter Touch host Pesticide Resistance Management Workshop - A Lighter Touch organised a workshop on 10 June 2025 on Pesticide Resistance Management (RM) with attendees from agrichemical companies and suppliers, industry groups, research institutes, trials providers and contractors. The workshop, held in Wellington encompassed five sessions of structured discussions, idea sharing and distilling information to concrete outcomes, utilising the experience and knowledge of participants from across crop protection. A key outcome of the workshop was to establish four dedicated working groups to further progress critical areas identified during the day: cross-industry collaboration, funding model, pesticide resistance surveillance, and education and extension. These working groups present a valuable opportunity to tackle some of the more complex challenges - particularly around collaboration and funding. A Lighter Touch is pleased to support and facilitate this process in partnership with registrants, suppliers, growers, industry groups, trial providers and contractors, along with the research institutions and scientists who have contributed significantly to the development and refinement of resistance management strategies. Read more here.

Investment period contribution	Co-investor contribution	MPI	Total investment
During this Quarter	$895,640	$430,770	$1,326,410
Programme to Date	$12,940,952	$7,725,006	$20,665,958