PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2025

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As A Lighter Touch (ALT) enters its final 18 months, the programme's strategic focus is on supporting partner product groups to extend project knowledge and resources to growers. Highlights this quarter include co-hosting events, webinars, and workshops - such as the New Zealand Plant Protection Society symposium on pesticide resistance, a four-part soilborne disease webinar series, and several extension workshops. ALT also participated in the Horticulture Conference, introduced new trials, and developed a new trap cropping case study. Biodiversity, extension, and technology initiatives continue to strengthen grower resilience and promote ALT's integrated approach.

Achievements for this period include:

ALT on-site at the Horticulture Conference – Being on the ground at industry events such as the Horticulture Conference in Wellington from August 26-27, facilitates connections, conversations and information-sharing alongside ALT product group partners and others in the industry supporting uptake of lighter touch crop protection. There were conversations with approximately 80 visitors and distribution of more than 100 grower resources. On day one of the conference, ALT programme director Livia Esterhazy shared an update on ALT's progress, key findings, and future focus.



A Lighter Touch team members (from left) Livia Esterhazy, Sydney Tayor and Gina Jewell at the ALT stand at the Horticulture Conference in Wellington.

ALT co-hosts NZPPS symposium – The New Zealand Plant Protection Society organised a one-day symposium, co-hosted by A Lighter Touch, focusing on "Pesticide resistance – Better managing the path forward". The symposium, which featured 16 presentations and a panel discussion, discussed the current state of resistance management, both in New Zealand and overseas, along with interim and long-term solutions across different sectors. ALT transitional technical lead Bruno Gatimel presented on the future development and ongoing maintenance of New Zealand's resistance management strategies. ALT programme director Livia Esterhazy gave the closing address, reframing the challenge of pesticide resistance and asking the audience to consider "how do we build resilience in our growers, rather than avoiding resistance?". Read more here.

Multiple new trials approved – Fourteen trials have been approved as part of the A Lighter Touch (ALT) programme's residue and efficacy work for the coming season. The efficacy of novel insecticides and softer biological options, which are essential to support sustainable pest control strategies, will be evaluated as part of the trial work. Many of these products show broad potential across pests, diseases, and crops, meaning insights from one specific trial can still offer valuable benefits to other sectors and the wider industry. Read more here.

ALT hosts four webinars on Soilborne Diseases - Soilborne diseases (SBD) are a major problem in many crops, causing crop losses, and costing growers millions of dollars in some sectors. Since ALT started, SBD have been amongst the highest-ranking crop protection gaps across all sectors. The purpose of the webinar series was to share what is currently known about SBD, what management tools growers have available to them now, and the direction of future innovations for management of these diseases. These webinars were hosted online during September 2025 with growers and crop protection advisors from across New Zealand attending. Read more here, and the recordings can be found here.



Horticulture NZ, Kaipara Moana Remediation and Growing Change representatives at a recent field day.

Dual benefits for growers with native planting - Earlier this year Horticulture New Zealand, through its Growing Change project, partnered with Kaipara Moana Remediation (KMR) to support growers to take up KMR practical projects. Native plantings to reduce sediment flows into the Kaipara Harbour are set to also provide growers with pest management benefits, using knowledge from an A Lighter Touch biodiversity project. Through this partnership, KMR planting specialist and nursery liaison David McDermott became aware of the A Lighter Touch (ALT) programme, and the plant species resource produced from the biodiverse planting on vegetables farms project. Read more here.



Farm manager Howe Young supervising the sweet corn crop at peak flowering. Credit: Olivia Prouse.

New case study on trap cropping in sweet corn - A new case study shares the integrated pest management (IPM) approach taken in successfully harvesting a sweet corn crop using trap crops as a control strategy for green vegetable bug (GVB). The case study, designed to support grower adoption, outlines the integration of the trap crop, which has the potential to offer a reliable, non-chemical option for managing GVB while supporting wider IPM and biodiversity goals. The use of trap crops around the sweet corn crop appears to have helped reduce the number of adult GVB entering the crop. However, low GVB pressure means the trial will be repeated this season, with refinements based on this year's observations, to test whether control holds under higher pest pressure. Read the case study here.

ALT host extension workshops – Extension workshops, hosted by A Lighter Touch and facilitated by extension experts Denise Bewsell and John James, focused on increasing knowledge and understanding about the use of biological crop protection tools and how to successfully integrate them into an existing crop protection programme. During the workshops, A Lighter Touch (ALT) product group representatives, agronomists and advisors working in extension learned about the importance of extension planning, how to create an extension plan in six steps and how to use a theory of change model to develop their plan. Read more here.



UV-C treatment being applied at 45 South Cherries in Cromwell as part of the Summerfruit NZ-ALT project trialling the technology for disease control.

Second season of trials of UV-C technology in summerfruit - A second trial of ultraviolet light technology to combat fungal diseases in cherries will build on first year findings and grow understanding of its efficacy as a disease management tool. Bioeconomy Science Institute (BSI), Plant & Food Research group, conducted the trial last season and will also undertake the coming season's work. The first-year results found the technology showed promise as a new, spray-free, sustainable tool for cherry disease management, but further research was needed under natural disease pressure conditions to confirm efficacy. In the second year, the same technology will be used, but this time under natural disease conditions. Read more here.

Investment period contribution	Co-investor contribution	MPI	Total investment
During this Quarter	$521,740	$517,947	$1,039,687
Programme to Date	$13,462,692	$8,242,953	$21,705,645