PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

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In early 2026, A Lighter Touch (ALT) advanced its goal to support growers adopting sustainable crop protection. Highlights from this period included a new video case study from the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm, ALT's presentation at the New Zealand Biological Symposium, and the use of ALT resources at a secondary school. Growers shared insights at a variety of events, while ALT supported the Vegetables Big Day Out with a focus on resistance management. An economic analysis also confirmed strong long-term programme benefits.

Achievements for this period include:

New video case study demonstrating the impact of growing with ALT - A new video case study focuses on the purpose and value of the demonstration farm, a collaborative project involving Vegetables NZ, Onions NZ, the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) and ALT. The focus of the project has been to demonstrate agroecological and integrated pest management approaches to crop protection for onions, vegetables and arable crops. The farm has become an extension hub for growers, hosting field days, collaborative events, and workshops designed to help build grower confidence in trialling new crop protection practices. Watch the video here.

ALT presents at the New Zealand Biological Symposium - ALT programme director Livia Esterhazy was one of several presenters at the inaugural New Zealand Biological Symposium held in Tauranga in February 2026. Livia says innovative technologies discussed at the symposium could provide new crop protection solutions to growers, and it was exciting to see biologicals being a focus for research and development here in New Zealand, reflecting global trends. "Biologicals development is on the increase here in New Zealand as it is globally. There is a real opportunity to turn around some of the key industry challenges including market access, resistance management and extend the number of tools in the grower's toolbox through effective integration and adoption of biological solutions." Read the article here.



(From left to right) Vegetables NZ General Manager Antony Heywood hosts the symposium panel discussion with Karen Booth of ACVM, EPA's Dr Lauren Fleury and ALT Programme Director Livia Esterhazy.

Resources used to demonstrate best practice in sustainable horticulture - ALT resources on agroecological approaches are being used to demonstrate best practice in sustainable horticulture at a rural secondary school. Yotam Kay, horticulture and environmental studies teacher at Hauraki Plains College in Ngatea, utilises ALT programme resources and guides to develop sustainable crop protection practices. He is working with students to set up an eight-hectare farm, which will include a wetland component with 4,000 native plants, an orchard with fruit trees, a market garden and a tunnel house to grow vegetables. The agroecological approaches championed by ALT are being shared with students and are central to the planning they are doing for the school farm. Read more here.

Growers share planting experience at Summerfruit Understory events - Summerfruit NZ and ALT hosted a day of orchard visits on the 26th of March in Roxburgh and Cromwell to share learnings and launch the case study resources developed from the Summerfruit NZ-ALT understory planting project. This event provided a chance to hear the grower insights first-hand on the benefits of a diverse orchard understory, and any challenges faced during the practical trial. All of those involved found less spraying and mowing was required, and that beneficial insects were two to four times more plentiful in the understory planted area. Read more about the project here.

A Lighter Touch supports Vegetables Big Day Out – Bruno Gatimel, ALT Technical Lead, presented on resistance management at the Vegetables Big Day Out in February 2026. Developing the foundation for an enduring, self-funded and collaborative resistance management programme is a key priority for ALT this year. Following on from earlier work updating existing RM strategies, ALT is progressing four areas of work, priorities determined through discussions with industry at a workshop in June 2025. A cross-industry approach to RM is critical, and the activities underway were developed with input from four working groups of industry representatives. Read the article here and watch the presentation here.



ALT Technical Lead Bruno Gatimel presents at Vegetables Big Day Out, March 2026.

New report shows major and enduring benefits from ALT - The economic analysis of the value of the ALT programme has been undertaken by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), drawing on data collected from interviews with 18 ALT stakeholders in New Zealand's arable, horticulture and viticulture sectors. In calculating the financial value the programme can deliver to New Zealand growers, NZIER compared three plausible outcomes resulting from the $27 million investment by industry and government in the ALT programme. NZIER determined that at this stage the most likely outcome was that by 2032, one in four growers would have made the shift from agrichemical reliance to more integrated practices, delivering benefit valued at approximately $92 million to $103 million (2025 dollars) until 2032. Read the article here.



Dargaville kūmara grower Luke Posthuma hosts growers in a paddock with an annual flowering strip in bloom.

Regional biodiversity champions host field visits - Vegetable growers implementing biodiversity planting to support crop pest management have helped to extend knowledge to other farmers. Growers have hosted "open paddock" field walks at their properties in vegetable growing areas around New Zealand to help extend knowledge gained from the Vegetables New Zealand-Onions New Zealand-ALT biodiversity project, which is located at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm. Supported by Vegetables New Zealand and A Lighter Touch, the field walks were held in Dargaville in February, in Nelson, Manawatu and Hawke's Bay in March, and in Gisborne in April. Read more about the project here.

Investment period contribution	**Co-investor contribution**	**MPI**	**Total investment**
During this Quarter	$ 674,485	$ 457,073	$ 1,131,557
Programme to date	$ 14,425,996	$ 8,545,588	$ 22,971,584