PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2025

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In 2025, the sixth year of the A Lighter Touch (ALT) programme, significant progress was made towards our goal of supporting a grower shift to more sustainable crop protection. Throughout this period, ALT facilitated on-farm engagement with government representatives, visited programme partner Corteva Agriscience, developed new extension-focused resources, and supported product groups through their events. Programme Director Livia Esterhazy also represented ALT internationally, presenting the programme's progress and insights at a global conference.

Achievements for this period include:

Monitoring and evaluating the progress of A Lighter Touch – Scarlatti was contracted to undertake a monitoring and evaluation project aimed at understanding how the A Lighter Touch programme was tracking to outcomes. The report showed that nine out of ten growers are already integrating agroecological crop protection approaches into their pest, disease and weed management practices. In addition to the practice change occurring on farms, orchards and vineyards, more than half of growers surveyed say their views about agroecological crop protection have become more positive over the past five years.

ALT hosts a team from Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) on-farm – In November 2025, A Lighter Touch hosted a team from MPI and EPA in Canterbury to visit ALT project sites and meet with growers. This showcased the new tools and technologies, adoption of knowledge, and integration into commercial grower farms. The day included a visit to a Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) grower site, a presentation on the Tomatoes NZ biocontrol project, a grower perspective on the importance of the regulatory case study project, and a visit to a cucumber grower located north of Christchurch. The team were able to hear direct from growers how the tools and knowledge gained through the programme has helped their business.



Representatives from MPI and EPA join A Lighter Touch governance group at a FAR grower site in Canterbury.

Understory planting field walks extend knowledge to growers - Hosted by Summerfruit NZ, the field walks in Central Otago and Hawkes Bay showcased the benefits of understory planting and provided attendees with useful tools to evaluate biodiversity in their orchards. Each field walk involved three practical components, a discussion about the understory plants, a visual soil assessment demonstration and a session focused on beneficial insects. The events helped extend knowledge from the Summerfruit NZ-A Lighter Touch understory planting project, which aims to enhance orchard biodiversity to support pest control and improve soil health. Read more about the project here.



Pictured (from left) are Corteva staff Brent Stevens, Matthew Denton Giles, Glen Surgenor, and A Lighter Touch programme team members Bruno Gatimel, Gina Jewell and Sydney Taylor.

ALT visits programme crop protection supporter, Corteva Agriscience – In October 2025, the A Lighter Touch team were fortunate enough to visit Corteva Waireka, one of the company's global research and development facilities, located near New Plymouth. Corteva Agriscience is a foundation crop protection partner of the A Lighter Touch programme and undertakes research and development at more than 120 facilities globally. Research conducted at Waireka contributes to the development of new crop protection solutions for both local and international markets. While visiting, the ALT took the opportunity to update the Corteva team on latest developments in the programme,

including work on resistance management, and this season's efficacy and residue trial work.



ALT Programme Director Livia Esterhazy (second from right) attended and spoke at the Annual Biological International Meeting (ABIM) Conference in Basel, Switzerland, last year.

Innovations in biological crop protection showcased in Switzerland - Livia Esterhazy, ALT programme director, was invited to present about A Lighter Touch at the Annual Biological International Meeting (ABIM) Conference in Basel, Switzerland, internationally recognised as the place to discover and unveil new biocontrol products. The take-home message was that New Zealand growers would benefit from access to innovative products that support a shift to 'lighter touch' crop protection, combat resistance and help meet export market requirements. Delegates from other countries were interested to learn about the ALT programme itself and the collaboration it has supported across sectors, industry, science and Government. The panel discussion where Livia presented focused on demonstrating and upscaling biocontrol. Read more here.

ALT Technical Lead presents on Resistance Management – The New Zealand Institute of Agricultural & Horticultural Science hosted the 2025 NZIAH Canterbury Forum "When Nature Fights Back". The topic was chosen because most of our agricultural and horticultural production systems rely on agrichemicals to combat challenges like weeds, bacterial and fungal disease, and parasites. Given the importance of agrichemicals to the agriculture and horticulture industries, new and better ways to combat these challenges need to be investigated. Bruno Gatimel, ALT Technical Lead, was invited to present at the forum on "Collaboration and future development on resistance management strategies".

New resources to support extension planning – Three newly published extension resources are designed to support effective delivery of new concepts and knowledge to growers. *Segmentation 101*, *Growing a Grower's Group* and *Electronic grower communications on a shoestring* are among several resources being developed by A Lighter Touch and extension experts Scarlatti to support ALT product groups in designing, implementing and evaluating their extension programmes. The resources include case studies and examples from the ALT programme to explain extension concepts and tools, and how to use them to improve the impact of extension efforts. Find more extension resources here.

ALT supports IPM workshop series - A series of workshops focusing on implementing an integrated pest management (IPM) approach to vegetable production occurred weekly between October and December. These were hosted by Vegetables New Zealand, with support from A Lighter Touch and the Bioeconomy Science Institute (BSI). The crop of focus was lettuce, but information on onions and barley were also included. Topics included crop monitoring, identification of pests and beneficial insects and understanding key diseases. The workshops were for growers, agronomists, and crop advisors and aimed to familiarise attendees with implementing IPM in vegetable production.

Investment period contribution	Co-investor contribution	MPI	Total investment
During this Quarter	$288,818	$325,126	$613,945
Programme to Date	$13,751,511	$8,568,079	$22,319,590