PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD APRIL TO JUNE 2026

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During this period, A Lighter Touch (ALT) continued to support New Zealand growers through collaborative research, extension and industry engagement activities. Key achievements included hosting the final Crop Protection Gaps Workshop, releasing a Buttercup Squash Soilborne Disease Toolkit and publishing new economic analysis on the value of resistance management. ALT also delivered expert-led grower engagement activities, including soilborne disease farm visits and the first of a national series of spray workshops focused on improving spray efficacy and resistance management. The programme's collaborative approach was further recognised through selection as a finalist in the 2026 Primary Industries New Zealand Awards.

Achievements for this period include:

A Lighter Touch address growing crop protection gaps - A Lighter Touch (ALT) hosted the 2026 Crop Protection Gaps Workshop in June, bringing together representatives of 13 crop sectors, alongside researchers, technical specialists and industry stakeholders, to review priority crop protection gaps and discuss opportunities for future collaboration after ALT ends in March 2027. This year was the sixth annual Gaps workshop ALT has hosted to inform efficacy and residue trial work undertaken through the programme. To date, 121 products have been evaluated through ALT efficacy trials, of which 48 were biological solutions, 72 softer chemistry and two were physical products. More trials will be undertaken this coming spring and summer before ALT ends. The workshop highlighted that while many sectors face different production systems and priorities, there are also many shared challenges and opportunities. Read more about the final ALT gaps workshop here.



The final A Lighter Touch gaps workshop held in Wellington in June 2026.



SBD project member Chris Lambert harvesting buttercup squash during a trial testing soilborne disease control options.

Development of a Buttercup Squash Soilborne Disease Toolkit - A new toolkit for squash growers details a range of strategies to help reduce the impact of soilborne diseases, taking an agroecological "whole of farm" approach. The grower toolkit brings together work from the New Zealand Buttercup Squash Council-A Lighter Touch (ALT) project focusing on soilborne disease management. Soilborne diseases (SBD) cause losses averaging around 30 percent a year for a sector with an export value of around $55 million. The toolkit explains the factors that lead to a buildup of pathogens and identifies the main pathogens affecting buttercup squash. It then outlines strategies growers can consider to reduce the impact of disease including crop rotation, service crops, biological controls and other approaches. Read the toolkit here.

New report shows the cost of not addressing resistance management - New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) report '*Deemphasising resistance management, exploring plausible futures*' provides a preliminary estimate of the costs of deemphasising resistance management. Without good resistance management, farm, orchard, and vineyard systems become more fragile over time. While the exact timing and scale of impacts are uncertain, NZIER's analysis indicates that costs increase as resistance pressures build. Modelling over a 10-year horizon shows that across NZ's growing systems, reduced resistance management could result in a loss of up to $1.26 billion. The biggest benefit of resistance management is keeping your future options open and helping your production system stay resilient. Read the full report and fact sheet here.



From left are Jono Ritchie, Brownriggs agronomy manager, Grace Ching, Brownriggs agronomy technician, Dr Len Tesoriero, and Sam Lindstrom, Brownriggs operations manager.

Growers tackle soilborne disease challenges with expert - The opportunity for a deep dive into soilborne diseases with an expert on the subject was embraced by Hawke's Bay and Gisborne squash growers at a series of farm visits in June. About 35 growers met with Australian plant pathologist Dr Len Tesoriero to discuss different aspects of disease management and disease issues during a week-long visit to the region, organised as part of the New Zealand Buttercup Squash Council-A Lighter Touch soilborne disease (SBD) management project. Project technical lead Dereck Ferguson, who accompanied Len on his visits with local growers, says the one-on-one visits were very well-received, with lots of questions and discussion. Len says while there were several threads in common across the various discussions with growers, there was a unique takeaway from every meeting. Read more here.

Residue technote developed for Tomato russet mite - A new technote produced by TomatoesNZ summarises results from a residue trial undertaken through the A Lighter Touch programme. The purpose of the trials was to recommend the pre-harvest intervals to meet the New Zealand default maximum residue level (MRL) for two new products, giving growers additional tools in their toolbox. The tiny Tomato russet mite causes russeting and bronzing of tomato leaves and fruit. Currently, growers have only one registered product with a label claim for Tomato russet mite control. The technote provides guidance on the off-label use pattern for use of two agrichemical in greenhouse tomatoes that will result in residues that do not exceed the New Zealand default MRL. Download the technote here.

A Lighter Touch host a series of educational spray workshops - With poor spray practice contributing to pesticide resistance, and costing growers both time and money, getting spraying right is critical. In partnership with ALT programme partners, ALT is hosting a series of educational spray workshops across New Zealand, focusing on helping growers achieve effective spray coverage. The workshops will focus on best practice, achieving effective spray coverage, and the calibration of spray equipment. Content will be tailored to crop types in terms of discussion around the spray mix, application and equipment. The first workshop was held in Pukekohe on June 18, focusing on field crops. Further information on the spray workshops can be seen here.



David Manktelow leads a demonstration at the ALT spray workshop in Pukekohe.

A Lighter Touch attends the Primary Industry Awards as an awards finalist – The ALT programme was selected as a finalist in the Team and Collaboration Award category, for the 2026 Primary Industries New Zealand Awards. Collaboration is at the heart of A Lighter Touch and is cited as one of its greatest benefits, so this accolade recognises the past six years of work put in by all 18 partners in A Lighter Touch, and the programme's staff. The ALT programme has created the platform and opportunity for collaboration across sectors and the industry, but it is the willingness of the partners in this programme to work together that has enabled so much value to come from it for growers, the participating sectors and the wider industry. Other finalists included the Water Force team and Sow the Seed Advisory and HATA Horticulture & Agriculture Teachers Association, who won the award.

Investment period contribution	**Co-investor contribution**	**MPI**	**Total investment**
During this Quarter	$361,997	$389,086	$751,082
Programme to date	$14,787,992	$8,934,675	$23,722,667