



A Lighter Touch

Agroecological crop protection to meet future consumer demands



Snapshot

Industry partners: Horticulture New Zealand Inc., with affiliated programme participants

Project length: 7 years

Start date: April 2020

Estimated completion date: March 2027

Industry funding: \$16,243,877

MPI funding: \$10,829,252

“A Lighter Touch” will address the challenge of meeting consumer demands for food produced under sustainable pest management practices that have a lighter touch on the environment. It will shift the focus from traditional crop protection by carrying out research, understanding crop protection products, and integrating biological and ecological processes into food production in New Zealand.

The opportunity

There is an opportunity for New Zealand to become the world’s preferred supplier of plant-based food products. Brand, reputation, and provenance of food are becoming increasingly important to consumers. To take advantage of this rapidly emerging market, and to protect against factors that may threaten our reputation, the plant-based food sector has come together to shift from agrichemical pest management to agroecological crop protection.

The solution

This programme will bring together the horticulture, wine, and arable sectors to help meet consumer demands by moving to agroecological crop protection and better managing agricultural ecosystems to reduce New Zealand’s dependence on chemical crop protection programmes.

The benefits

If successful, this project is expected to benefit New Zealand by:

- Increasing investment in the horticulture, arable and wine sectors.
- Enhancing the value of New Zealand’s reputation and brand.
- Increasing the value of New Zealand’s horticultural, arable and wine exports.
- Increasing the diversity of New Zealand’s agricultural production.
- Introducing new technology and management know-how into New Zealand’s economy.
- Maintaining the social licence to farm for New Zealand horticulture and arable cropping.



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The programme has three interrelated work streams.

- **Theme 1: Enduring Outcomes.** Ensuring the successful long-term transition to agroecological crop protection and an ongoing focus on consumer demands, agroecology, use of novel biopesticides, adoption of biological control strategies, and incorporating the best crop protection products and technologies into industry-wide crop protection programmes. This will be achieved through strategic planning, consumer research, telling our story, establishing structures to continue coordinating research, and leading effective change in crop protection long after the programme ends.
- **Theme 2: Agroecological Crop Protection.** Achieving mainstream adoption of agroecological crop protection in New Zealand. This theme will incorporate biopesticides, biological control agents, and a range of new technologies into industry crop protection programmes. It will research barriers to upscaling production and adopting new crop protection products and biological agents. Focus groups and proof of concept sites will be established to demonstrate the effectiveness of agroecological crop protection programmes.
- **Theme 3: Transition Projects.** Achieving effective resistance management through a new suite of crop protection product registrations, incorporated into crop protection programmes. This will support the transition to agroecological crop protection, and will position sectors to better meet market demands.