New tech sizes-up fruit

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NZ AGRITECH company Hectre and its Spectre app are delivering fruit size and colour data to US packers and growers earlier than ever before.
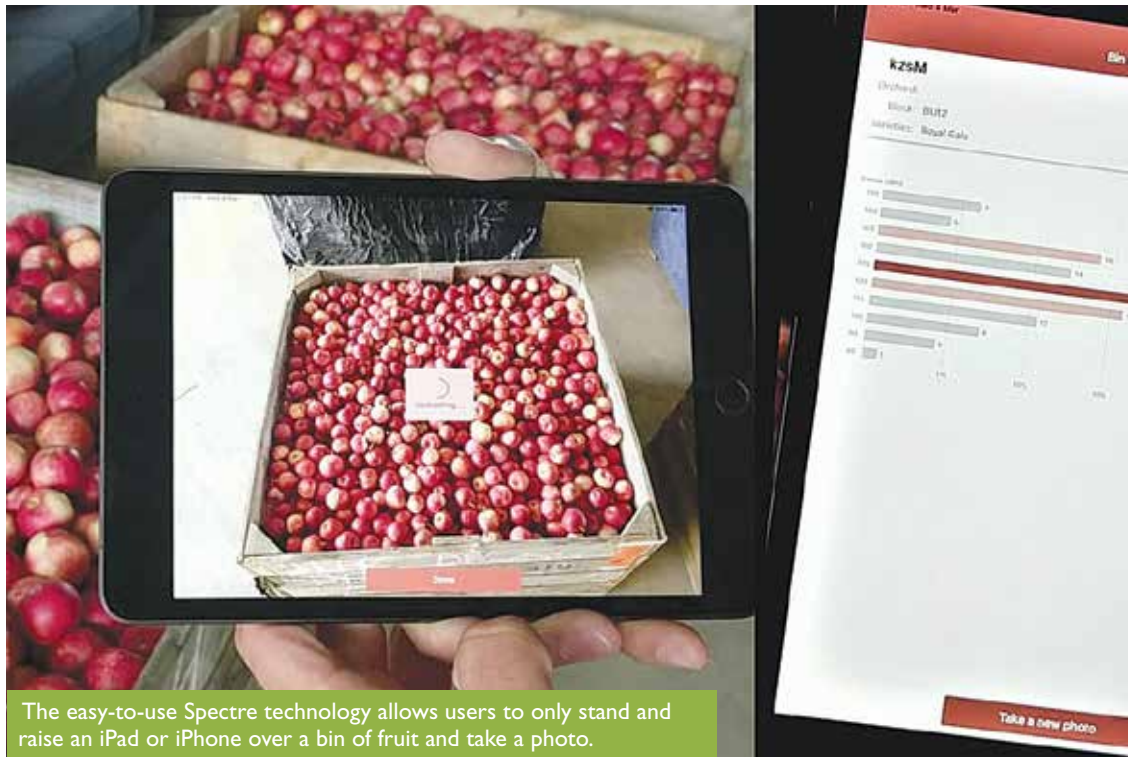
Having faced the same issue for many years, fruit packers and growers have been unable to gain early access to quick and accurate fruit size and colour information at harvest time. It was finding a solution to this type of problem that led NZ entrepreneur Matty Blomfield to co-found Hectre in 2016 and launch Spectre for Apples in 2020.

Spectre is a computer vision AI solution, developed as part of the Hectre app on iPhone and iPad. It sees fruit such as apples just like the human eye would see them. Using proprietary technology,

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Hectre has taught the computer how to detect pieces of fruit, how to size those pieces of fruit, and for apples, to assess the colour.

Growers can use Spectre in their orchards as soon as the fruit is picked, gaining early size data, which they can share with their packhouses to

The easy-to-use Spectre technology allows users to only stand and raise an iPad or iPhone over a bin of fruit and take a photo.

inform sales plans.

"For fruit packhouses, huge value is gained with Spectre, with quick and easy capture of size data and colour estimation

reducing the incidence and negative impacts of incorrect storage, packing line resets, and wasted labour and fruit," Blomfield explains.

He adds that with a commitment to "clever simplicity", the Spectre technology is easy to use, requiring users to only stand and raise an iPad or

iPhone over a bin of fruit and take a photo. Within seconds, fruit size distribution graphs are served up, delivering massive increases in sample sizes,

without the need for more expensive equipment.

Fruit growers and packers across 11 countries are now using Hectre's orchard technologies, including First Fresh NZ, Rockit, BC Tree Fruits and fruit leaders Washington Fruit & Produce.

"The more we know about the size profile of a particular grower's crop in advance of it being brought into the packhouse, the better we can plan our sales programs," says Ian Albers, managing director First Fresh NZ.

Spectre currently sizes apples, oranges, lemons, and mandarins; while in response to demand from the cherry industry, a Spectre for Cherries pilot is now underway with cherry packers in Washington state.

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