

# Digital QC tools help improve picker performance

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**T**ech is taking on a greater role in the growing world, and digital QC is finding its place. With ever-increasing costs of labor, there's a high need to optimize the pick.

More growers are using piece rate as a pay strategy, which brings the advantage of incentivizing greater productivity. The simple logic of "the more you pick, the more you earn," has been proven across many regions. It's why more growers are choosing piece-rate as a key pay for performance approach. But that doesn't mean it's easy.

One of the greatest concerns is ensuring quality does not get compromised by the need for speed.

New Zealand fruit growers have been using piece-rate picking approaches for some time. As a country known for producing the most apples per hectare in the world, they know quality is king.

The innovative nation is also the birthplace of our company Hectre — double-award winners in the global AgTech Breakthrough Awards. We brought our tech to the U.S. in 2018. Customers now include Washington Fruit & Produce, Borton Fruit, Sage Fruit, Monson Fruit and CPC.

It's one of the only fruit apps to offer a comprehensive digital quality control module.

"We learned from growers early on that they lacked access to their QC information, and QC is often limited to ad-hoc feedback, resulting in favoritism and delayed corrections of poor picking practices. All of that compromised fruit quality, which meant reduced packouts. It was clear to us that we had to deliver a solution that had a high focus on QC," said Hectre CEO and co-founder Matty Blomfield.

Digital QC modules enable growers to track how much QC inspection is happening, what the outcomes are and where there are picker performance issues, enabling corrective action to be taken promptly, positively



Blue skies and apple blossoms at Moana Orchard in New Zealand.

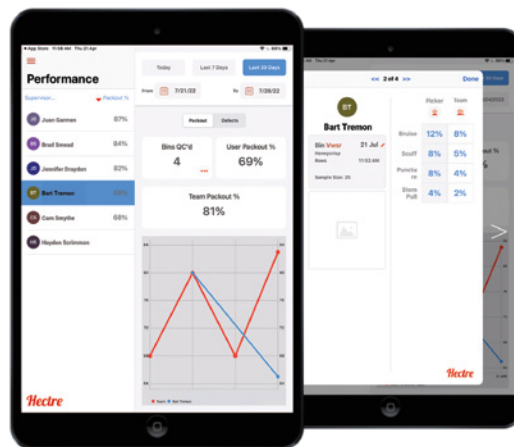
impacting the pick. Digital QC also highlights where pests and disease are impacting the fruit. With cloud-based apps like Hectre, all of that data is viewable in real time.

In New Zealand, nestled on 222 acres near the tip of South Island, Moana Orchard grows and packs apples for both domestic and international markets.

Chris McNally, production manager at Moana Orchard, said they've always had a strong focus on quality control and wanted an app that could support that. "Before we moved to a digital QC option, we would accumulate a sea of QC paper sheets which we didn't always have time to wade through," he said.

"Typically, we'd have a QC person check about 25 apples per bin, checking for picking damage or defects, and they'd record their findings on QC sheets. We'd then need to go through those to get an idea of what each picker was doing and to identify outliers. Then it would end up in the recycling bin!"

Moana joined Hectre in 2018, giving the company multiple seasons under its belt. "With Hectre, we can see QC results in real-time and can view how many bins each QC worker has checked," McNally said. "We can see the defects being picked up in the app and can identify straight away which pickers are below the team QC averages. Because we know early, we can fix the problem early and improve the quality of the pick." ■



An example of digital QC showing QC that has been conducted and highlighting a picker that is falling well below team averages. Photos: Hectre