

GOOD FRUIT & VEGETABLES

New Zealand agtech startup Hectre wins UPL Tech Innovation Award at Hort Connections 2023

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Ian Cass from UPL Technology with Hectre co-founder and CEO, Matty Blomfield, accepting the Tech Innovation Award at Hort Connections 2023. Picture by Andrew Beveridge

A PROGRAM that enables fruit packers to rapidly receive large amounts of accurate data on fruit sizing as it arrives at the packhouse has been scored a major innovation horticulture innovation award.

The New Zealand start-up, Hectre, won the UPL Tech Innovation Award at the 2023 Hort Connections Horticulture Awards for Excellence Gala Dinner, in Adelaide on June 7.

The award is a celebration of individuals or businesses that have implemented technology-focussed innovation from across the Australian or New Zealand fresh produce supply chains.

Hectre received the award in recognition of its new technology, Spectre Top Down, which combines an overhead camera and artificial intelligence (AI) to detect and determine the size of up to 5000 pieces of fruit in the back of open-top trucks.

As trucks pull up under the camera, Spectre Top Down scans the top layer of fruit and within seconds delivers early fruit size data that is 95 per cent accurate.

The new system has already been adopted by major apple packers in the US, and application of the technology is now being explored for pears, citrus, cherries, avocados and onions.

Hectre's Kylie Hall said it was a great space to be a part of.

"We serve one of the most essential and one of the most challenged industries on the planet," Ms Hall said.

"Delivering solutions to address the worries that keep growers and packers awake at night is what drives our team at Hectre every day.

"To be recognised in these awards for the contribution we're making with our transformative early fruit sizing and orchard management tech, is fantastic fuel for our fire."

The award adds to Hectre's growing trophy cabinet having won Most Innovative Tech Startup of the Year - Software and Most Innovative Tech Startup of the Year - Business Product Industries, at the 2023 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards, regarded as among the world's premier business awards.

Ausveg chief executive Michael Coote said early access to data on produce sizing can help growers and packhouses to make critical sales, storage and packing decisions.

"Hectre's new system gives the industry access to accurate sizing data in a much higher volume and much shorter timescale than was previously possible, avoiding costly packline stoppages and other problems," he said.

"Technology like Hectre's Spectre Top Down can be a game-changer for the horticulture industry, enabling faster, more efficient operations, and reducing waste and cost.

"Innovative use of technology like this represents the future of horticulture, and I congratulate Hectre on addressing this industry need, and on receiving the UPL Tech Innovation Award."