An ag-tech start-up says it can save apple growers time and resources while also increasing their revenues with its crop monitoring and forecast solutions, and it is now looking to grow its presence in the southern hemisphere.
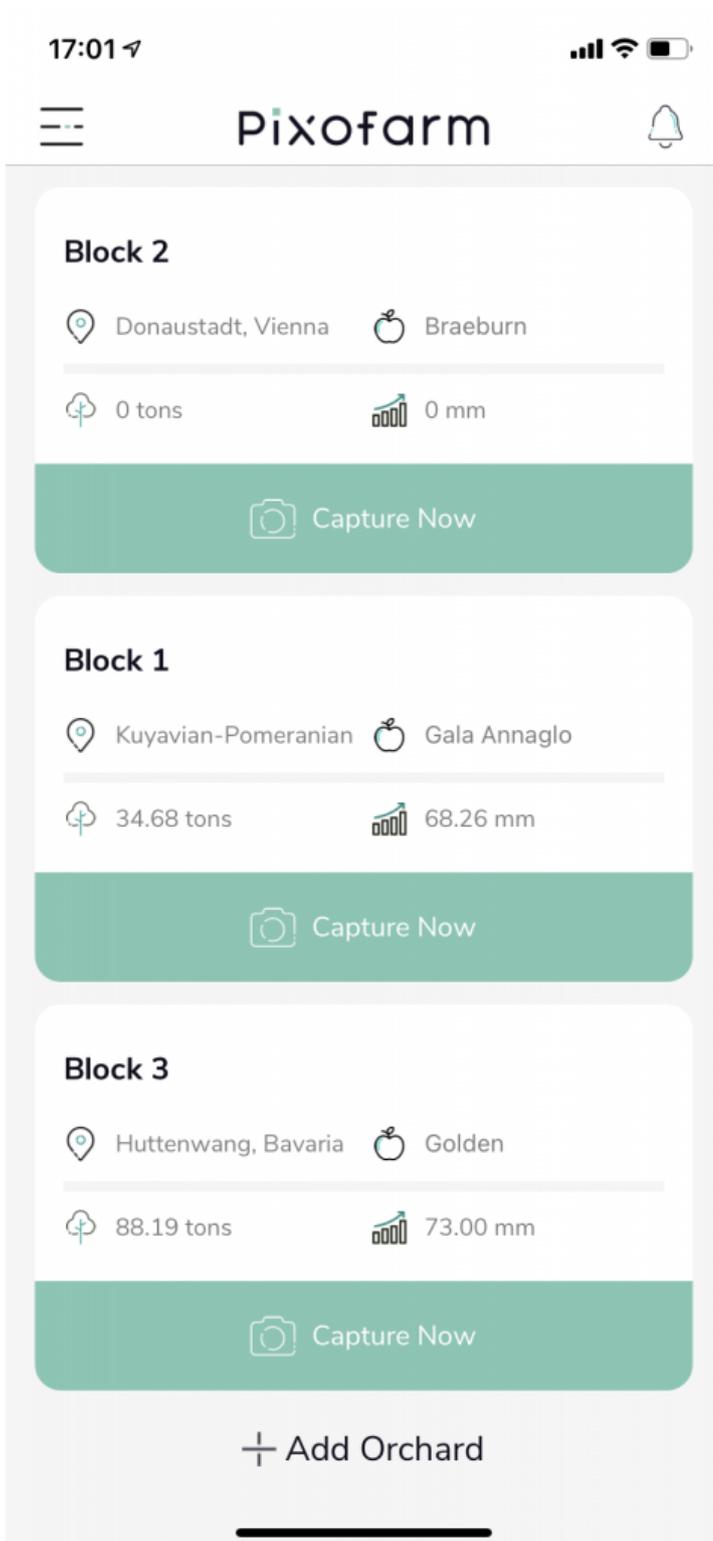
Austrian-based Pixofarm has developed an app that uses advanced image processing technology to analyze photos taken in the field on a smartphone and then share that information with a dashboard.

The grower can measure the size and growth rate by putting a sticker on the apple and taking an up-close photo, and they can also accurately count the fruits by taking a photo of the tree. Based on this information, they can get reliable yield estimation data.

"Pixofarm takes the guesswork out of crop counting and can help producers to optimize their logistics, storing, packing and inventory management efficiency," said Pixofarm CEO Farid Edrisian.

He explained that the company offers two packages - forecasting and monitoring.

The monitoring solution is for growers who want to only digitally measure, collect and share data about their orchards. Features include fruit measurement, fruit counting, daily growth rate calculation, weather data and an online dashboard.

Meanwhile, the forecast solution is for growers who would like to use Pixofarm's AI to
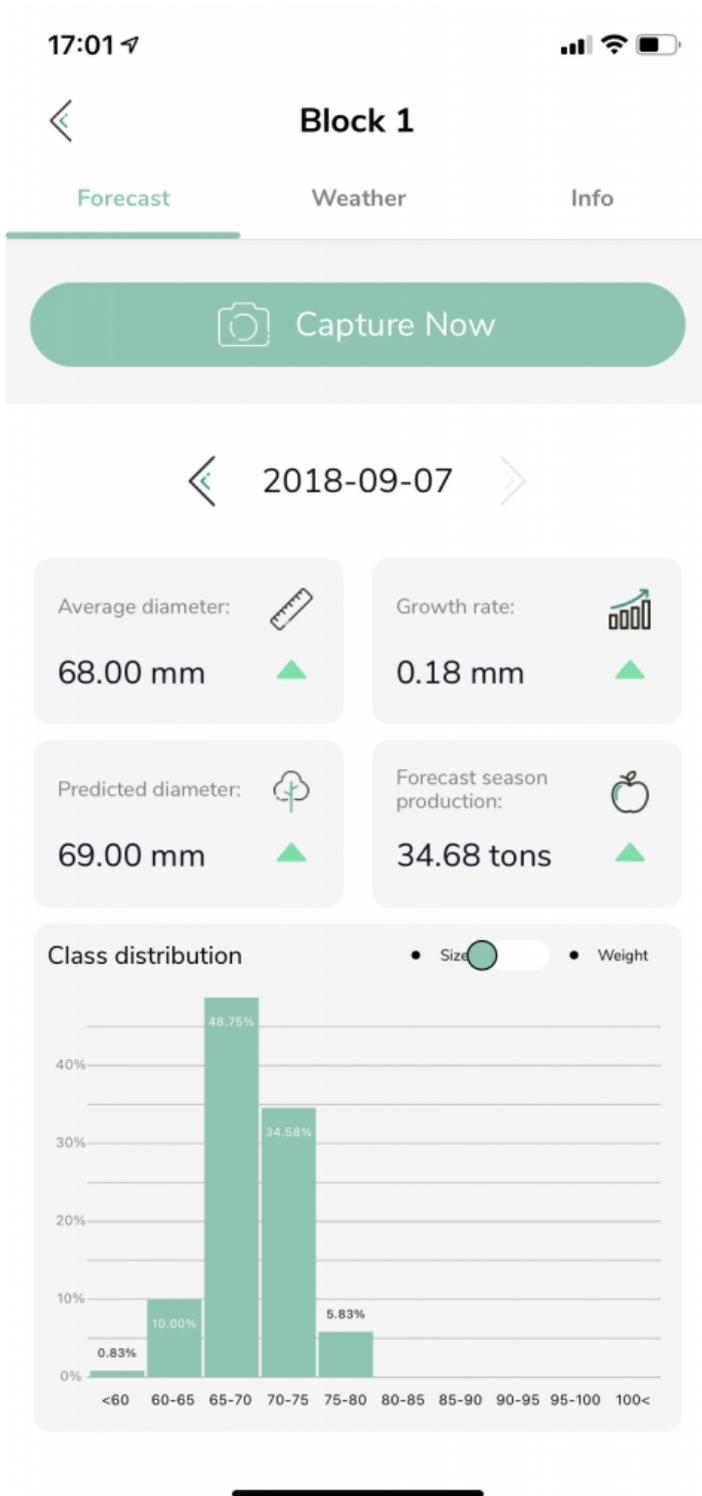
accurately predict fruit diameter, size and weight class distribution, and forecast and optimize total production. Features in this package include all those in the monitoring package, as well as predicted diameter, weight class distribution and total production forecast.

The benefits that Pixofarm provides apple growers are so impressive that the company in November won the Interpoma Startup Award, which was called "the most epic battle of innovation in the apple economy, and in September it won also the "best practical solution for the agri-food sector award" at Startup Europe Smart Agrifood Summit 2020.

Edrisian explained that while growers and production companies are the target customer group, the solutions can also greatly benefit other supply chain stakeholders such as exporters or packing companies.

"We offer complete flexibility and accessibility of the solution for every grower worldwide," he said. "In addition, it is very cost-effective with no limitations of time and the number of measurements."

He highlighted that it provides an excellent return on investment, thanks not just to the significant savings in labor costs, but also because it optimizes various important processes.

"For example, if they know that the apples are going to be too small – which usually receive lower prices in the market – then they have means like thinning or irrigation to improve the

yield, so they can actually earn more money in the end," he said.

"Another very important point that makes savings possible is to optimize operational processes like packaging, logistics, warehousing and export planning, based on the forecast data they get a couple of weeks in advance"

Pixofarm rolled out its solution this year and was used by companies and producer associations in key European apple-growing countries including the U.K., Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Italy, France and Spain.

Now, Edrisian said the company is looking to grow in southern hemisphere production countries like Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Argentina, and South Africa, who will soon begin their apple season.

"The counting feature that we just officially launched is very important, because it's a real game-changer for many growers. It makes the whole process of fruit counting a lot more efficient and saves them time and money," he said.

"Our main differentiator to other competitors is the flexibility that growers have with our solution. They have the tool in their pocket and can measure and count whenever they want and how often they want without any additional costs, which is something really unique."

The pricing of the product varies with regions and orchard size, and demos are also offered so that the solution can be tested first.

For more information, please visit: www.pixofarm.com