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This company is basically putting Fitbits on trees because no one has time to measure trunks

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Arbre Technologies, Inc. devices deployed at Leaves Inspired Tree Nursery in Chilton. (Photo: Arbre Technologies, Inc.)

Measuring trees is boring. It takes a lot of time to have a person hold up a ruler to each tree's trunk at a nursery.

The task doesn't even add value to the product. But it's necessary for sellers to know their inventory.

A Wisconsin company has created a new device that can measure the diameter of trees instantly.

"It's sort of like a Fitbit for a tree," [Arbre Technologies, Inc. \(http://arbretech.com/\)](http://arbretech.com/). Director and Partner Matt Vollmer said. "The components inside are very different, but it's an easy analogy."

Arbre Technologies, Inc. has deployed its devices that use radio-frequency identification technology at 25 tree farms across the U.S. and Canada. The device, a band placed on a tree six inches from the roots of a Maple or Birch tree, takes measurements when scanned with an RFID reader. The data is stored in the company's inventory management system.

Vollmer and his co-founder Ben Meyers — they have been friends since kindergarten — started the business in 2016. Arbre has offices in Milwaukee and Stevens Point.

The advertisement is a rectangular banner with a dark green background. In the top left corner, there is a circular logo for "USA TODAY MONEY" in white and green. To its right, the headline "Your Best Life: Preparing for a Baby" is written in white. The center of the banner features a white rectangular area with a play button icon, indicating a video player. Below the banner, there are three main elements: on the left, the text "Push Button. Get Mortgage.®" in white; in the center, a green button with the text "Learn More" in white, with "NMLS #3030" written in small text below it; and on the right, the "ROCKET Mortgage by Quicken Loans" logo in white.

The idea sprouted from trying to build an inventory software platform for a tree nursery in Chilton where trees are in the ground for a few years before being sold.

The cost of labor on the farms is increasing and margins are getting squeezed. Arbre Technologies thinks this is a way that farms could save time and money.

The company recently raised \$600,000 with financing from Winnebago Seed Fund and BrightStar Wisconsin. The money allowed Arbre to expand its team to five full-time employees in June. Arbre Technologies has raised \$655,000 to date. Revenue has doubled every year for the last three years, Vollmer said.

"Counting and measuring inventory doesn't add value to the product," Vollmer said. "If we can take away that, then employees can take time to take care of other areas that add value to customers. It's really about efficiency gains." The inventory also changes over time — trees grow, die and experience environmental factors.

The measurements with radio-frequency identification technology is more accurate than those taken by hand, Vollmer said. It also allows farmers to take measurements more often. The goal is to collect measurements more often, not just to have precise inventory data right now, but to eventually be able to use that information to project inventory years from now.



Hardware engineer at Arbre Technologies Inc. Michael Schwarz works on CaliperRFID at Leaves Inspired Tree Nursery in Chilton. (Photo: Arbre Technologies, Inc.)

Arbre Technologies thinks its devices have a much broader application than a tree farm. The RFID is also passively collecting other information like humidity and temperature. The team is thinking about how it could be used in forestry and climate change research.

Sarah Hauer can be reached at shauer@journalsentinel.com (<mailto:shauer@journalsentinel.com>) or on [Instagram @HauerSarah](https://www.instagram.com/HauerSarah) (<http://instagram.com/hauersarah>), and [Twitter @SarahHauer](https://twitter.com/SarahHauer) (<http://twitter.com/SarahHauer>). Subscribe to her weekly newsletter *Be MKE* at [jsonline.com/bemke](https://www.jsonline.com/story/nletter/be-mke/2018/08/02/mke-who-we-where-we-go-what-we-need-know/756174002/) ([/story/nletter/be-mke/2018/08/02/mke-who-we-where-we-go-what-we-need-know/756174002/](https://www.jsonline.com/story/nletter/be-mke/2018/08/02/mke-who-we-where-we-go-what-we-need-know/756174002/)).

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