

Meet Arbonics, helping landowners realise the climate impact of their land

As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Lisett Luik, cofounder of Arbonics about the potential of nature-based solutions, fighting climate change and harnessing next-level tech.

Temps de lecture : minute

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The climate crisis is the greatest threat of our time, myself and Kristjan knew we wanted, and needed, to build something that would have a material impact on the planet today, and for future generations. The long answer is more nuanced, but just as critical - *Arbonics* sits at the intersection of everything that matters most to us. As Estonians, a love of nature and technological progress is in our DNA. We grew up surrounded by forests, rich in biodiversity; we were part of communities that pulled together to rebuild Estonia, from scratch, in the wake of Soviet occupation; we saw the tech-revolution that now sits at the heart of the region's legacy evolve before our eyes. Despite us both taking our skills and passions into other jobs, in other countries, we gravitated back to these roots. In 2021, fuelled by a mutual desire to put our unique perspective to the best use possible, we founded Arbonics. It harnesses the power of nature, it's driven by a strong sense of shared action and community, it bridges the gap between analog and digital and past and present in the same way the Estonia of our childhood's did, and it's underpinned by next-level tech.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

With Arbonics, we want to become the number one ally for landowners across Europe, helping them realise the climate impact of their land. The business centres on unlocking the potential of nature-based solutions, particularly forests, to fight climate change. Data has repeatedly shown that our greatest weapon in the fight against climate change is nature itself. In the case of afforestation and reforestation, the carbon-removal potential that forests bring is as much as 5x higher than any other solution being worked on today. Yet historically, it's a solution that's been largely overlooked. The reasons are many but it largely comes down to one overarching concern - trees seemingly don't bring the immediate carbon and economic benefits of other alternatives. With Arbonics, we use tech to transform how landowners analyse and calculate their carbon sequestration potential - the process of capturing, securing and long-term storage of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere - while empowering them to unlock new income sources from their forests. We work with farmers and landowners to identify land suitable for afforestation, we monitor soil types to make sure the right trees are planted in the right places, we demystify the carbon credits and voluntary carbon market. All with the aim of accelerating a win-win situation for all - the owners, their communities, and our planet. It's something we call the New Forest Economy and we believe it's the future of forestry.

To reach our landowner partners, we go to where they are: we host in-person seminars, we publish educational material in local languages in addition to English, we are present in the local media channels they read and the Facebook groups they join.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We're still pretty new. We spent almost a year working in stealth and officially launched last year so we're still witnessing the early stages of Arbonics and its impact. Very much like the saplings and forests our landowners have planted! What we have established in this time, however, is just how much our vision is shared by our farmers, landowners, investors and team. It can be easy, when building a startup, to not see the wood for the trees if you excuse the pun, but the response we've received validates our mission. While the backing of such great investors and supporters gives credibility to the idea that nature really does hold the key to tackling climate change.

Tell us about the working culture at Arbonics

We've been extremely lucky to draw highly accomplished team members with a variety of backgrounds but what connects us all is a shared belief that we can, in fact, accomplish big things to tackle the climate crisis. Every member of the Arbonics team passionately believes in the impact that bringing tech and nature together holds for the future. As a team, we operate on a few key principles: we believe in being bluntly honest, in taking joy in data and in always pushing each other. And we also work hard to keep in touch with the problem we're solving - whether it's through spending a week working in the forest last summer, or joining one of our landowner partners for our second annual tree planting session in a couple of weeks.

How are you funded?

We're backed by Plural which was co-founded by some of Europe's best founders and operators including fellow Estonians - Taavet Hinrikus and

Sten Tamkivi. We raised a €1.8M pre-Seed round in 2022.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Convincing farmers and landowners of the value that forests can bring, not just in terms of climate change but as part of the New Forest Economy, has been relatively easy. These owners know their land and industry so deeply and it's been a pleasure working with them towards our shared goal. Yet getting people outside of the industry to recognise the true potential forests hold hasn't come as easily. There is such a broad narrative that surrounds climate change, carbon credits, tree planting schemes and all of this can cause some of the messages to become lost. It's much more than "just plant more trees", it's about maximising our climate efforts; making sure the right time and investment is put into the right projects, at the right time. It goes far beyond semantics and goes towards - what do we ultimately want to achieve? If you ask this question, most people answer from the same page. The biggest challenge we, and other climate-tech startups face is turning this motivation into action. The more we highlight the power of forests, the more we work with landowners, the more we engage with regulators and the more people we touch with this messaging, the smaller this challenge becomes. It's just a very necessary, ongoing process.

How does Arbonics answer an unmet need?

The unmet need is the need to save the planet. If solving climate change was straightforward, or if technology alone held all the answers, it wouldn't continue to dominate headlines. It wouldn't result in hundreds and thousands of pages of legislation, debate and discussion. Yet by meeting the unmet needs of landowners and unlocking the value of their land at the same time, we're helping to future-proof their businesses as

well as climate solutions, which in turn increases all of our chances of success.

What's in store for the future?

Over the coming months and years, we are focusing on further improving and expanding our data-based product offering. We want to provide landowners with even more context and accurate input for decision-making. We plan to continue expanding our market footprint in order to reach all landowners across Europe, while carrying on building a team that we can be increasingly proud of.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

My dream of starting Arbonics dates back to my time at university when I first got involved with building companies from scratch yet it took years to take the leap on a particular idea. For too long, I was my own worst enemy; I kept thinking "if I could learn just one more skill or be better at X" then I could start. Yet in reality, that day would never have come. As a founder, you're always learning, you're making mistakes, you're constantly leaving your comfort zone but this is what makes the role so rewarding. In short, you don't have to be a superhuman to start a company. You just have to start.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

People sometimes assume that being an entrepreneur means you're fully in charge of your time - I wish! The reality is that no matter how well I plan, ad-hoc things tend to pop up all the time, throwing my plans out of

order and creating more stuff to do than there is time for. This means I have to be very mindful of how I spend my time. I use an extensively colour-coded calendar, where I also track non-meeting activities, so I can see exactly how much time went on an unexpected accounting issue or a last-minute request from a partner we're negotiating with.

And to stay sane in the ups and downs of startup life, I try to stick to some personal routines: every morning starts with taking my dog for a walk in the nearby park, and I try to work out at least three evenings a week.

Lisett Luik is the cofounder of *Arbonics*.

Article by Lisett Luik