



# INTERVIEW

## STEVE TATRO, owner, T.I.P., Inc.

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, *Badger Common'Tater*

**NAME:** Steve Tatro

**TITLE:** Owner

**COMPANY:** T.I.P., Inc.

**LOCATION:** Custer, WI

**HOMETOWN:** Stevens Point, WI

**YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION:** 34 years

**SCHOOLING:** University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, degree in business management and marketing

**ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS:** Past Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) Associate Division Board member, including a term as president; Golf Course Superintendents Association of America; Workforce Performance Training; Workforce Investment Board; National Federation of Independent Businesses; Ruffed Grouse Society; and National Rifle Association

**AWARDS/HONORS:** 2011 WPVGA Associate Division Business Person of the Year, and numerous sales awards from T-L Irrigation

**FAMILY:** Wife, Ann; daughter, Melissa; two sons, Jake and Max; and one grandson, Henry

**HOBBIES:** Travel, skiing, hunting, fishing, waterskiing and anything outdoors

*The name T.I.P.—Tatro Irrigation & Potato—says a lot, but it doesn't say it all. Not only does the company manufacture and deal in potato and irrigation equipment, but it has expanded over the past 46 years to offer growers an array of products, services, and technologies.*

Owned by Steve Tatro, T.I.P., Inc. of Custer, Wisconsin, was started by Steve's father, Bill, in 1976, and has expanded from offering potato equipment into irrigation, custom manufacturing, and golf course maintenance equipment.

T.I.P. imports and distributes potato equipment from Europe throughout North America, and, in recent years, has diversified into fertilizer products for potato, vegetable and fruit growers, as well as turf grass.

The company started as a Lockwood



Owner of T.I.P. (Tatro Irrigation & Potato), Inc., Steve Tatro says the thing he's most proud of is that the company has been able to evolve into many market sectors with multiple revenue streams.





dealer and shortly thereafter became the first Double L dealer east of the Mississippi River. In the 1980's, T.I.P., Inc. brought the first cup planters to North America from Norway (Underhaug/Kverneland).

The family-owned business continued its expansion, manufacturing a full line of turf improvement products for natural and artificial surfaces, and amassing a dealer network that stretches across the world.

More than a decade ago, T.I.P. added the AgGrow Solutions division to distribute products from several companies, including Redox, AgroLiquid, SPS, Bio SI Technologies, Ag Bio Tech and Organisan.

And there's more to the story, according to Tatro, who was interviewed for this issue.

**T.I.P. is a family-owned business since 1976. What makes you most proud regarding the history of the company and how it has evolved?**

From our humble beginnings just selling potato equipment, the thing I am proud of is that we have been able to evolve our company into many market sectors with multiple revenue streams.

We now have a very diverse company. We have always looked outside the box to find the best quality products from around the world to bring them to our customers.

**There are many facets of T.I.P. Why was it important to diversify over the years?**

In business, you always need to be evolving. Market conditions change, customer demands change, suppliers change,

**Above:** T.I.P., Inc. has been selling T-L Irrigation systems for over 30 years, including modern features like the new Gooseneck Cradle Corner System Attachment. The Gooseneck Cradle Corner option drops the corner connection point by 24 inches, lowering the span's center of gravity and greatly improving its stability on steep terrain and in areas with high winds or frequent severe storm activity.

world economies change. If you don't move with the markets, you don't survive.

**Do you feel there are areas of the business where T.I.P. excels, particularly in potato and vegetable growing in Wisconsin and the Midwest?** I think we excel in bringing the best solutions to our growers, from field to storage. We back that up with reliable service from a skilled service team.

*continued on pg. 10*



**LET'S MAKE YOUR PLANS A REALITY, TOGETHER.**

**Our focus on exceptional client experience is at the heart of everything we do.** With a unique perspective born from decades of working in agriculture, we provide insights and expertise through partnerships built on trust and respect. And our experienced financial team will help make every step easy and convenient.

See why our clients trust us to make their goals possible.

[COMPEER.COM](https://www.compeer.com)



Compeer Financial can provide assistance with specialty crop financing and operations based on historical data and industry expertise. Compeer Financial does not provide legal advice or certified financial planning. Compeer Financial, ACA is an Equal Credit Opportunity Lender and Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer. © 2022 All rights reserved.

**Cathy Schommer**

*Sr. Focused Lending Specialist*  
(608) 370-6792 | [Cathy.Schommer@compeer.com](mailto:Cathy.Schommer@compeer.com)

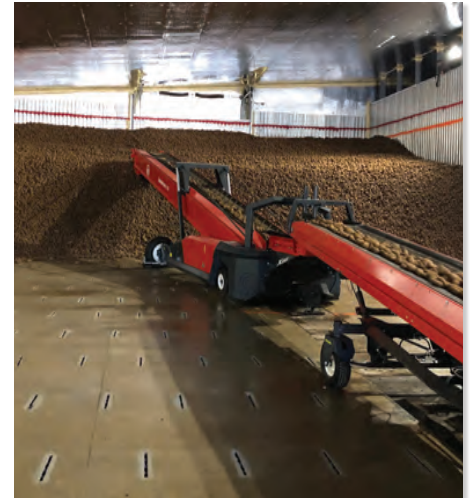
**Ty Rohloff**

*Sr. Food & Agribusiness Lending Specialist*  
(608) 757-9747 | [Ty.Rohloff@compeer.com](mailto:Ty.Rohloff@compeer.com)



**Interview . . .**

*continued from pg. 9*



We want to ensure our customers have the most up-to-date products from around the world to help them be more efficient and profitable.

We all share common goals in this industry—family, success, health, and happiness.

**Can you update me on some of the new products, technologies, and services T.I.P. offers in the areas of irrigation and specialty equipment?**

We are excited to be bringing the AMD (AgGrow Multi-Product Dispersal) system to market. The disinfection system kills 100 percent

of pathogens in a treated space using a cold sterilant approved by the Environmental Protection Agency.

By using the machine, which emits a sub-micron aerosol that is food safe and reaches every nook and cranny, leaving no residue, growers, packers, and shippers will improve storage conditions and increase food shelf life.

The aerosol is approved for fogging as an adjunct to cleaning on all exposed surfaces, and is not only food safe, but biodegradable and organic.

The AMD system is a single, compact

**Above:** As the Dewulf/Miedema distributor for the central United States, T.I.P. offers the high-tech, fully automatic Miedema ML 2280 Piler. Using sensors and software that determine when and where potatoes are being piled into the storage, it automatically fills and sets the tiers, width, and height of a pile, as well as the angle of the product on the pile.

unit that includes an aerosol generator and vapor removal system, and it delivers a dense cloud of fog droplets for the high-level disinfection of large spaces such as those found on farms, in potato and vegetable storages, packing sheds and food processing or shipping areas.

**Is irrigation still a large part of the business, and if so, what are some of the most important technological advances in that area?**

Irrigation is part of what we do here at T.I.P., Inc. There have been several advances over the past several years with regards to telemetry and GPS controls.

We have been selling the T-L Irrigation systems for over 30 years. They are very reliable systems and now have all the modern features just like all the other manufacturers in the industry. The continuous movement and simplicity are what set us apart from the others.



Steve Tatro says he is proud of the team he has assembled, including, from left to right, Curtis Johnson, shop foreman; Kenton Mehlberg, agronomy sales manager; Steve (owner); Andy Verhasselt, agronomist; and John Zdroik, parts manager.

*continued on pg. 12*





**What areas of specialty equipment, including manufacturing, are you offering growers that you'd like readers to know about?**

We have done some amazing projects over the years! From one-off potato plot planters, and sample washers to custom corn root ball harvesters that collect specific genetic material, we can build just about anything.

We have built self-propelled ginseng sprayers with articulating frames lately, as well as a few six-row ridge hillers with stainless hoods.

We also build many different stainless steel conveyors and holding bins, and Evenflo tubs in cooperation with Volm Company.

If you need something unique, let us know. We can do it.

**Are there certain brands of irrigation, potato, and vegetable equipment that T.I.P. offers or imports that perhaps the competition doesn't?**

We are the Dewulf/Miedema distributor for the central United States. We also are a Double L and T-L Irrigation dealer, and on the fertility side, the Redox distributor as well as AgGrow Liquid, Organisan, Bio-SI and Dakota Peat, to name a few.

**What do you yourself specialize in, Steve, as owner of the company? Are you more of a manufacturing guy, or sales, agronomy, irrigation?**

As a business owner, you must wear many hats! You need to know about every facet of your company, but you also need good people on the team that are experts in what they do. The company is only as strong as its people.

I pride myself in having a very good group of associates with a common goal. This gives us an advantage in business.

I have always had a knack for building things. I am proud that I can listen to what a customer wants and then implement those opportunities into a product or service that works for them.



T.I.P., Inc. just sold a Miedema CP42 four-row cup planter to a seed grower in Antigo, Wisconsin. It combines seedbed preparation, planting, and ridging capabilities in a single pass, and features a large bunker and potato-friendly planting elements.

**How many employees does T.I.P. have and in what areas?** We have 10 full-time associates along with several CSR's (customer service representatives) on our agronomy side of the business. We also do internships and have apprenticeships with the local high schools and technical colleges.

We are always looking to grow and strengthen our team.

**I believe your son, Max, has become involved in the company, is that correct? So now it's third generation, and if so, in what area does he specialize?** Yes, we are going on the third generation now. I am proud that we are continuing with the next generation, and Max is an integral part of our team.

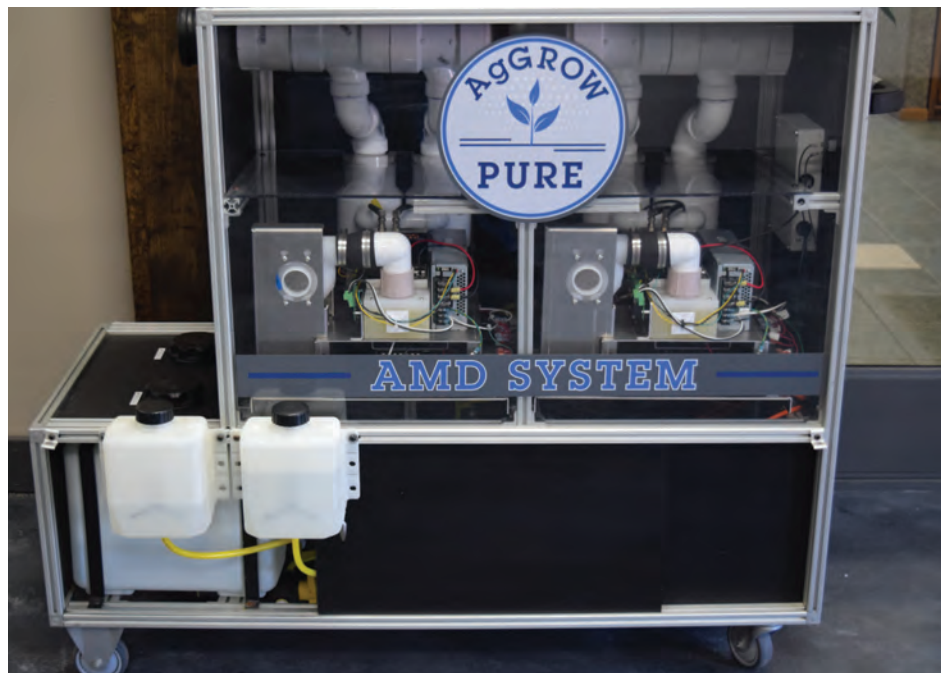
He is a very good listener and has a great mind for business. He has been focusing on the turf side of the business as well as delivering all the equipment and the fertilizer for the agronomy side.

Max needs to know all sectors of our business to understand how things work and have valuable input to the growth of the company.

This will ensure the success of T.I.P., Inc. and AgGrow Solutions, so when the time comes for me to step down, I know it will be in good hands for the customers to continue to trust and work with us.

**Kenton Mehlberg, who is married to your daughter, Melissa, was our interview in the July 2019 issue and is an agronomy sales manager for AgGrow Solutions. Tell me about that division of the company and Kenton's role.** AgGrow solutions is our fertilizer and crop improvement division. We offer complete and comprehensive fertility and agronomy solutions to growers. We have an extensive fertility lineup and have been growing exponentially each year.

Kenton has been at the helm of this division for eight years now. He has



T.I.P. is bringing the AMD (AgGrow Multi-Product Dispersal) system to market. The disinfection system kills 100 percent of pathogens in a treated space using a cold sterilant approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. The machine emits a sub-micron aerosol that is food safe and reaches every nook and cranny, leaving no residue.

done an exceptional job along with Andrew Verhasselt. Andy is a very capable and skilled agronomist who brings a lot of knowledge to the team. Kenton has assembled a group of CSR agronomists that span the whole state now.

We just expanded our team with Bart "Bo" Wink, who has his master's degree in agronomy from Iowa State and specializes in grain crops.

We are excited to have him here and know he will give us a wealth

*continued on pg. 14*



## CHROME ALLOY WEAR PARTS

\*\* See all our parts online at [www.rhmachine.com](http://www.rhmachine.com) \*\*

R & H manufactures wear resistant parts for planting, fertilizing, cultivating, ripping, and harvesting. Our Chrome Alloy replacement parts will wear smooth, save downtime, use less fuel and last longer --resulting in a lower cost per acre.



*If abrasive wear is your problem ~ ~ ~*

***R & H Machine has your answer!***

R & H Machine · 115 Roedel Ave · Caldwell, ID 83605 · 1-800-321-6568

***Setting the Standard for Wear!***



**Interview . . .**

continued from pg. 13



of knowledge as we navigate these interesting times in agriculture.

**You've been involved in the WPVGA and served a couple terms on the Associate Division Board, one as president. Why is it important for you to be involved with the WPVGA?**

I think it is always good to be involved in your industry. The connections, communication and education are necessary to stay abreast of the constant changes in the industry.

And it is important to give back to the industry that has been so good to us over the past 40-plus years.

---

*“We all share common goals in this industry—family, success, health, and happiness.”*

**– Steve Tatro**

---

**What trips your trigger as far as working with Wisconsin potato and vegetable growers?** The challenge of solving problems, identifying opportunities, and helping growers

be successful—it makes me feel good knowing we are contributing to the success of growers.

**What do you think you and your employees have to offer them that maybe they can't get elsewhere?**

Quality products and service, along with the respect and honesty that the customers deserve. We treat every customer as a partner to help them be successful.

**Is your company still expanding, and if so, in what areas?** We are always looking over the horizon. Stay tuned. There are some good things coming!

**What does the future hold for irrigation and specialty equipment, and what do you see as T.I.P.'s role in that future?** More growth and evolution. We are always trying

**Above:** As part of its manufacturing division, T.I.P. has built everything from self-propelled ginseng sprayers with articulating frames (top left) to six-row ridge tillers/dikers with stainless hoods (top right) and stainless hoppers (left).





to be better, gain more knowledge and find the best solutions for our customers.

**How much can the company expand, and do you want it to grow?** We are only going to expand at a pace that will not jeopardize our customers. We never want to lose sight of them, and we will always offer the best service and support we can. You can't do it all! But what we do, we do well.

**Has T.I.P. been negatively affected by labor and/or supply chain and trucking issues?** I think everyone has experienced this in one way or another given what has been going on around the globe for the past two years.

We can only control ourselves and our actions. Every day is a

new day. You just need to buckle down and get done what you can. This too will pass.

**What do you hope for the future for T.I.P.?** My hope is that T.I.P., Inc. will be around for another 50 years! I would love to see the fourth generation take it to the next level.

**Is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add, Steve?** I would just like to say thank you to all our customers, friends and suppliers who have trusted and supported us over the years. You are greatly appreciated.

I look forward to many more years of success for everyone! Stay safe and may God bless us with bountiful crops. **BCT**



**Above:** Being a Miedema dealer gives T.I.P. the flexibility to offer products as diverse as the MB 111 non-stop automatic box filler and the company's Flexible Grader for cleaning and grading potatoes.

**FAMILY OWNED & GROWN**  
**J.W.**  
**MATTEK & SONS**  
FOUNDATION & CERTIFIED  
SEED POTATOES

**OVER 50 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN SEED PRODUCTION!**

**SNOWDEN • PIKE • ATLANTIC • LAMOKA  
MEGACHIP • HODAG • MANISTEE  
SILVERTON • LADY LIBERTY**

**N5798 Star Neva Road • Deerbrook, WI**  
Telephone: 715-623-6963 • Fax: 715-627-7245 • Email: [jwmattek@gmail.com](mailto:jwmattek@gmail.com)

**Contact: Jim, John or Joe**

**WISCONSIN  
CERTIFIED  
SEED POTATOES**