



INTERVIEW

SEAN TIMM, president, Vantage North Central, and vice president, North Central Irrigation

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

NAME: Sean Timm

TITLE: President

COMPANY: Vantage North Central

TITLE: Vice president

COMPANY: North Central Irrigation

LOCATION: Plainfield, WI

HOMETOWN: Mazomanie, WI

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: 18

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Cummins NPower, LLC (now Cummins Sales and Service)

SCHOOLING: Agriculture engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS:

Oasis Town Board for 16 years, coach of Plainfield Little League with son, Leland, and Plainfield United Methodist Church

FAMILY: Wife, Melissa; and son, Leland (9), and daughter, Elena (4). "Our kids were born five years apart on the same day," Sean says. "Yes, they have the same birthday."

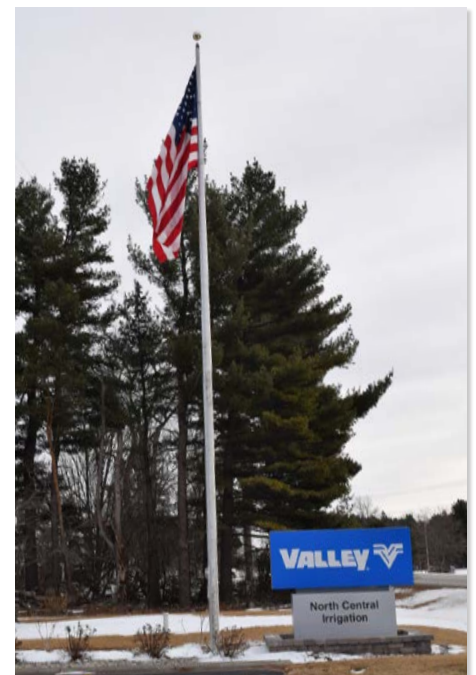
HOBBIES: Hunting, farming, and driving Traxxas radio control cars with Leland

Above: Shown in his office, Sean Timm, vice president of North Central Irrigation, says, "All our employees are like family, and they're the ones who make us successful. It's a family atmosphere that's been cultivated here since the beginning. We wouldn't be where we're at without our employees."

Sean Timm's grandfather, Leland, really did walk from school to the farm every day during the horse and buggy days. It was a small dairy farm that his parents (Sean's great-grandparents), Henry and Lena Timm, started on County Road A outside of Plainfield, a distance most kids couldn't fathom walking today.

Unfortunately, Henry passed away at an early age, and Lena raised their kids in town while renting out the farm. "Once Grandpa Leland graduated from 8th grade, he told his mom that he wanted to go back to farming because the people on the farm weren't taking care of it the way he wanted," Sean says.

"My father, Nathan, had hay fever issues, so Grandma and Grandpa didn't expand the farm much," Sean explains. "My dad worked for the





Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in Madison, and Mom taught in the local school.”

“My introduction to farming was coming up to visit Grandma and Grandpa,” he adds. “My dad would help raise crops, and Grandma and Grandpa milked cows until they were 77 years old, selling milk to the Wild Rose Creamery for cheese and butter.”

“When they finally quit milking, they were down to seven cows and probably 20 head of cattle total in the barn,” Sean relates.

THE FARMING BUG

The farming bug never left Sean, who eventually moved to the town of Oasis, outside of Plainfield, and today raises corn and beans on approximately 150 acres of land.

“I keep doing that because my kids are going to grow up knowing how to work,” he says. “The dynamic of farming has changed, with 1 percent of the people growing 99 percent of the food, but you can’t replicate the experience of growing up on a farm.”

“Ask any experienced business owner, in or outside of the ag industry,” Sean suggests, “and they’ll tell you that they can train a farm kid.”

Farming also led to Sean’s dual roles



today as president of Vantage North Central and vice president of North Central Irrigation, in Plainfield.

“It really started with irrigation, back in 2006. I wanted an irrigation well on the farm because I was sick of the stuff I was growing burning up,” he states. “I worked with Roberts Irrigation to get a well dug, and I knew Scott and Candi Polzin of North Central Irrigation prior to that.”

“When I started to work with Scott [president of North Central Irrigation]



Left: Sean Timm (left) couldn’t be more proud of his family, including his wife, Melissa, and children, Leland (9), and Elena (4).

Middle: Sean Timm’s children, Leland and Elena, are ready to drive the skid steer. “We were just getting started with site prep for a new building at the farm,” Sean relates.

Right: This picture of a new pivot/irrigation system installation was taken at Patrykus Farms in Bancroft, Wisconsin.

on installing a pivot after the well was dug, he watched me dig and lay pipe,

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move my own equipment, and pour concrete, all without having to ask a lot of questions,” Sean explains.

“So, Scott’s dad, Doug, came to me and asked if I would ever consider doing something else. I had it pretty good at Cummins, but now that I’ve been with North Central Irrigation for nearly two decades, I never look around at what other jobs are out there,” he remarks.

What about North Central Irrigation convinced you to build a career at the company? We’ve got a great group of guys. All our employees

are like family, and they’re the ones who make us successful. It’s a family atmosphere that’s been cultivated here since the beginning. We wouldn’t be where we’re at without our employees.

My son calls Scott “Grandpa.” Leland came into the office with me this morning. He does that all the time, and then I drop him off at school. He knows all the guys in the shop, and they’re nice to him, letting him help when he can.

Leland drives tractors, excavators, payloaders ... when he was six years

Left: A Valley machine is delivered to the field for installation.

Right: When this photo was taken, the team at North Central Irrigation had just finished water hookup on a new pivot install at Lein Dairy Farms in Almond, Wisconsin.

old, he drove a thousand-bushel grain cart by himself during harvest. Those are some proud moments.

Farming is tough. There’ve been many times over the years when I need to get the crops in, and at the same time, we’re extremely busy here at North Central Irrigation.

Even at 9 years old, Leland will begin



The North Central Irrigation showroom in Plainfield, Wisconsin, is staffed with knowledgeable people experienced in servicing the equipment they sell.

sorting things out first thing in the morning, asking, "What are we going to start with today, Dad? We could go here or there, and we need this equipment. I could start with the brush chopper, and you can take the rake ..."

The idea of him planning how to proceed with the day's chores is somewhat remarkable. He goes out by Grandpa and gets in the little snowblower tractor and clears his driveway for him.

Is Vantage North Central the technology/Trimble arm of North Central Irrigation? When North Central Irrigation started working with Trimble on variable rate irrigation (VRI) as it came onto the scene in Central Wisconsin and began to take hold, that's how Vantage North Central was created.

If we wanted to get started on the GPS (Global Positioning System) end of the business and sell, install and

"In my opinion, farmers have had to be precise for a long time, so precision agriculture is nothing new. How it's administered, the practices, how they're completed, and how info is tracked and moved in front of the right people is new."
– Sean Timm

service Trimble ag guidance out of our facility, we needed a second entity to run it.

At the time, we had a greater concentration of growers using VRI here in Central Wisconsin than anywhere else in the nation.

We were hoping we'd be able to find some more qualified people who are experts in the areas of GPS and VRI, but it's proven to be a challenge.

We've had some good people, and some have moved on.

What are the top three or four products that North Central Irrigation and Vantage North Central currently sell and service?

Irrigation is the bread and butter of the business by a long shot. Tractor guidance (Trimble) and implement guidance are also up near the top.

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Growing potatoes is a fussy business—once you put seed in the ground and finish hilling, you don't want to move the hill. You don't want your next pass with the tractor, sprayer or applicator to swipe the hill and expose potatoes to the elements. Repetition in hilling and spraying, pass to pass, is important.

You don't want to change the tire

location from the previous pass when going down the row. That's where implement guidance comes in, and though we don't do tons of implement guidance, we do it better than anyone else.

Some of what we learn on the irrigation side of the business transfers back to the GPS guidance end, and vice-versa. Both ends of the

Above: Being tuned up and spruced up in the North Central Irrigation shop are a Terex "Commander" digger derrick and a company service truck.

business are valuable to us.

For periods of time, Valent didn't have good options for pivot-corner guidance, but through our own experience and knowledge, we came



The North Central Irrigation crew is shown towering a new corner arm for Heartland Farms in the first image, and rolling a tower back over in the second photo after two machines accidentally hit each other. No pipes were damaged, and the crew had the irrigation unit back up and running for Heartland Farms 14 hours after it happened.



up with alternatives that were just as good as others for the customer.

How much time and effort goes into servicing what you sell? I'm a bad salesman because I want to solve customers' problems. I don't set out with a goal of selling them something, but rather in forming relationships with our customers. That's what keeps them coming back repeatedly.

We make mistakes, but we own them. That was the philosophy behind North Central Irrigation long before I came here. Scott and his dad, Doug, knew that doing what they said they were going to do was important, a philosophy that binds the company and customers together better than pricing.

When customers buy on price alone,

they might not experience quality and service after the purchase. In the end, we all work on competitive machines, but we need to solve the customers' problems when they have issues with the equipment or its operation.

Does service need to be expedient?

There's a timeframe of how fast things need to move in agriculture. Farmers don't have time to be without water or a tractor. I've followed a planting crew for 70 hours to try to solve problems they were having because they couldn't shut down to figure out what was wrong. If they did, it would have a ripple effect long after planting season.

I think it's difficult for the public to conceive the absolute nature of agriculture. We were a proud

Left: The contracted Sifuentes build crew and North Central Irrigation crew are shown at a new corner arm install on Sean Timm's farm. Sean is pictured fourth from left, just below his son, Leland, sitting on the Valley control panel box.

Right: At age 7, Leland was driving the grain cart on the family farm during soybean harvest that year.

part of supporting the Pavelski family and the Food + Farm Exploration Center. Valmont saw value and got on board, and Scott and I see the value and are happy to be a part of it.

The idea of a farm-to-fork exploration and learning center is necessary. Too many people don't understand where their food comes from, let alone the rigors of what farmers go through to get it onto their plates, and the

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uncertainty and pitfalls growers face season after season.

How else can North Central Irrigation help in that regard? We also do our best to provide a completely positive experience through our products and in adapting and evolving through technology.

We have an in-house mechanic who not only services our vehicles, but also the customers' if they choose. We try to do what's right for people through a good quality product at a fair price and not sell them equipment they don't need. That's honestly and why I'm a bad salesman.

We're the ones taking service calls, Scott and I, and we're as familiar with the machines as the customers who are running them. By finding economical solutions for customers, then at the end of each project, you feel good about what you did.

How important is the technology sector in irrigation? Huge. Irrigation scheduling is something that's continually being developed to help growers figure out when watering is necessary. Experience trumps any scheduling product, but finding technology that helps growers with useful information is crucial.

Valley has long offered a base station for remote-control platforms, so multiple people can run pivots. Through remote access, thousands of hours and millions of miles of wear and tear on vehicles have been saved over the lifetimes of the equipment. That's why farmers still crave them.

Valley's BaseStation3 has been offering advanced irrigation management for efficient water use and crop health, and now the company is moving on to the AgSense 365 irrigation management system, which uses modern digital technology to keep growers connected to their farms.

Our new EnCompass Sequencing uses



the same platform as sprinkler VRI on each individual sprinkler head and machine and sequences the corner arms.

I had the first EnCompass corner in our area. I went from an older corner arm, and I can see a vast difference in the crop and water application. So, Valley has taken another leap forward through the updated sequencing and precision corner water application.

Farmers are always looking for ways to better manage their businesses, and VRI is still a key piece of technology that hasn't fully come into its own yet.

VRI is useful in multiple aspects of the cropping system. How much water do you have to pump in certain areas of the field that are of differing soil types, or within low-lying areas

Above: The HDPE (high-density polyethylene) pipe installation put in by North Central Irrigation runs under County BB in Waushara County.

versus elevated parts of the field? Irrigation is not a blanket need but beneficial where needed.

Another advantage of VRI is in meeting the challenges of living and working in highly scrutinized areas of the state. We hang closer in the balance of having some real problems in this area than some people realize.

Water is one of the largest drivers of the economy, and from my experience, the public, along with some members of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), think we over-pump water, which couldn't be further from the truth.

Most of these people have never raised a crop and barely stepped into a field, so for them to regulate water in a field and economy they know nothing about is ludicrous.

Right now, on the farm, I'm trying to redrill a well that my grandma and grandpa drilled in 1968, and to retain my permit, the DNR wants me to cut water use by 40%. I can barely raise corn and beans as it is, and they're devaluing my land. This is rearing its ugly head.

What does precision agriculture mean to you? In my opinion, farmers have had to be precise for a long time, so precision agriculture is nothing new. How it's administered, the practices, how they're completed, and how info is tracked and moved in front of the right people is new.

It's not just GPS or VRI, but also the fact that farms have whole IT departments, and there are tablets and Wi-Fi networks in fields to transfer information at planting,



hilling, and harvest.

Precision agriculture is the connection of every GPS manufacturer from their screens back to the Cloud platform or farmers' platforms.

I think drones that incorporate cameras (including those that help

Above: The North Central Irrigation team installs two pivots at the Food + Farm Exploration Center.

identify disease) and have spraying capabilities and artificial intelligence (AI) will become a big part of farming over time.

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Application at Planting:

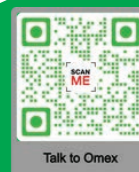
- Rate: 1 quart per acre
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Application with First Watering:

- Rate: 1-2 quarts per acre
- Timing: Apply with the first watering to enhance water penetration, release tied-up nutrients, and neutralize salts in the root zone.

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Using drones to apply crop protection products has a lesser impact on fields than traditional spraying, so the practice is being eyeballed by a lot of people. Obviously, when it rains, aerial spraying is an option for a grower who can't get out into the field because of mud or flooding.

The farmer still needs to apply products to the plants. They don't stop growing, and application timing is critical. When Mother Nature throws you a curveball, drones can be a big help.

Drone cameras are intensive products, though, because they require someone to look at the imagery and analyze it. That's where AI can be useful in analyzing the images and providing information.

Why do you think Trimble software and services are user friendly or advanced? Trimble had a legacy platform and has now gone to a Cloud-based platform that people log into to be able to track expenses on all facets of their farm, access spray and irrigation reporting, and monitor equipment and operations.

How has the irrigation business changed since you've been aboard? The manufacturers have worked at trying to add value to the precision end of the products, and they've done a good job at keeping up a core

product without trying to gut out the original design and cheapen it. Valley's done well.

Valley is the only machine that can be run on just about any terrain. You put some machines in certain areas, and their structure can't handle it. Valley is a great product, but to me, what makes us good is the value that our people at North Central Irrigation bring to the Valley product.

What other services do you offer?

We help growers starting at the service entrances of their properties and move throughout their operations. I run a lot of projects, doing anything from digging to laying and moving pipes, pouring concrete, and wiring systems. We lead from the front.

Have you built relationships with growers? Absolutely, because they're people who have known me and my family since the beginning. The relationships I have with some of the growers go far beyond professional aspects. There are several growers around here I'd consider family. It's a tight-knit group.

What do you hope for the future of North Central Irrigation and Vantage North Central? I want to see it continue down a path of success and maybe have a chance for my kids to enter the

Above: The new Valley pivot installation and water hookup pictured was completed for Eric Siler on his farm.

field if that's what they want to do.

I want to continue to be able to operate and give our employees the ability to keep supporting their families and our customers, and to keep solving growers' problems.

I want to see my kids do what they want to do. They'll be exposed to the business and core values of what goes on here and hopefully carry on farming's core values in their lives. It will serve them well down the road.

Is there anything you'd like to add that I failed to touch on? Just my appreciation to people in this profession and even in my previous profession at Cummins. There have been people who have given me opportunities and taken time to show me things. That's what I'm trying to do with my crew, to pass along info to people like those who helped me.

I have a lot of love and respect for Grandma and Grandpa. I've learned a lot and wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have those relationships and opportunities, including my relationship with my wife and the sacrifices she's had to make. You work a lot of hours in this business. **BCT**