



THE BEST FROM EVERY HARVEST



NAME: Leighton Hill

Title: Regional Sales Manager-Americas

Company: Wyma Solutions

Location: Christchurch, New Zealand, supporting customers and partners throughout North America

Hometown: Christchurch, New Zealand

Years in Present Position: "I have spent the past 14 years with Wyma, progressing through engineering, project management, and territory management roles before moving into my current position two years ago. This has given me a well-rounded understanding of our business, customers, and industry, combining technical expertise with commercial experience."

Schooling: University of Canterbury with a Bachelor of Engineering degree with Honours

Activities/Organizations: Wyma has a long-standing commitment to the global potato industry and actively supports the sector through membership in leading potato and fresh-produce organizations. These include the Potato Association of America, International Fresh Produce Association (A-NZ), Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Northland Potato Growers Association, United Potato Growers of Canada, Potatoes New Zealand, and the World Potato Congress. Through these memberships, Wyma remains closely connected to growers, processors, researchers, and industry leaders, helping the company stay at the forefront of innovation and industry developments.

Family: Wife and two daughters

Hobbies: Motorsports, rugby, and supporting daughters in hockey



INTERVIEW

LEIGHTON HILL, Regional Sales Manager-Americas, Wyma Solutions

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, Badger Common'Tater

Wyma's story began in 1962, when Linton Engineering was established in Canterbury, New Zealand, to manufacture and service agricultural and produce-handling equipment, particularly for local potato growers.

The business was purchased and renamed by John Wyma in 1991, and the development of the Vege-Polisher™ soon followed. That machine became an important turning point for the international root vegetable industry.

Andrew and Angela Barclay purchased the company in 2001 and expanded its focus beyond individual machines into complete washing, grading and post-harvest line solutions for customers around the world.

Wyma now has manufacturing capability on two continents and

equipment operating in more than 50 countries.

In 2023, Wyma joined MHM Automation, and in 2024 both became part of Fortifi Food

Above: As regional sales manager-Americas for Wyma Solutions, Leighton Hill says Wyma Solutions has a long-standing commitment to the global potato industry. The Wyma product offerings form part of the portfolio identified as the Wyma and Volm partnership in North America. The right combination of machines, Hill says, depends on throughput, crop varieties, soil conditions, available water, desired pack-out and the amount of automation an operation can realistically support.

Processing Solutions, broadening the automation, robotic handling and whole-facility capabilities available to customers.

What's remained consistent is Wyma's engineering approach.

"We start with the customer's crop, operating conditions, facility constraints and commercial objectives," says Leighton Hill, regional sales manager-Americas, "and then configure a practical solution around those requirements rather than expecting every operation to fit a standard template."

Which machinery and technologies that Wyma Solutions offers can best help potato and vegetable growers, shippers and packers in Wisconsin?

For Wisconsin operations, the greatest value usually comes from looking at the whole process rather than selecting one isolated machine.

That can include controlled receiving, debris removal, destoning, washing,

polishing, drying, sizing, inspection, water recycling, storage-bin filling and integration with downstream grading and packaging equipment.

Particularly relevant equipment includes:

- Wet Hoppers for receiving, soaking, pre-cleaning, buffering and regulating product flow.
- Cyclone and Flume Destoners for removing stones early and protecting downstream equipment.
- Barrel Washers and Vege-Polishers™ for controlled washing and improved retail presentation.
- Horizontal Debris Removers and Hedgehog Top Removers for separating dirt, vines and other field debris.
- Absorbent Drying Rollers to remove surface moisture before inspection or packing.
- Lift Roller, Screen and Vibrating

continued on pg. 10



Above: Wyma Solutions Wet Hoppers are used in receiving, soaking, pre-cleaning, buffering and regulating potato flow into a packing plant.



Contact: Jim or John

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Length Sizers for separating produce into appropriate size ranges.

- Micron Filter XL, Rotary Filter and Mud Tower systems for treating and reusing process water.
- Vertical Bin and Bag Fillers for gentle, controlled filling.

These products form part of the portfolio identified as the Wyma and Volm partnership in North America. The right combination of machines depends on throughput, crop varieties, soil conditions, available water, desired pack-out and the amount of automation the operation can realistically support.

What are the newest technologies or machines you're most excited about and why? Two developments stand out for me. The first is the Micron Filter XL and the wider modular water-treatment offering. Water use, discharge constraints and handling of soil and organic waste are becoming increasingly important operating issues.

The system can combine coarse filtration, fine filtration and gravity separation so that water can be reused at appropriate stages of the wash process. It also converts

separated soil into a more manageable waste stream.

The important point is not simply filtering water. It is improving control over water quality, freshwater demand and waste handling across the entire line.

The second is the Optical Vege-Trimmer™. It combines optical sensing, intelligent recognition and automation to assess individual vegetables and select a trimming position. It is an example of how vision technology and artificial intelligence can address labor availability, consistency and yield rather than being technology for technology's sake.

I am also excited about better plant-level automation, remote support and data visibility. These tools can make complex lines easier to operate and support, although the controls still need to remain understandable, serviceable and appropriate for the customer's workforce.



Above and Left: As their names imply, Flume and Cyclone Destoners remove stones early and protect downstream equipment.

Volm Companies is the main distributor for Wyma Solutions in Wisconsin and the U.S./Canada. Why did Wyma choose Volm Companies?

Wyma and Volm have worked together in the North American potato industry for many years, with a formal strategic partnership announced in 2017.

Volm brings extensive knowledge of fresh-produce operations, established relationships across the industry, packing-line integration capability and a coast-to-coast distribution and technical service network.

That complements Wyma's strengths in post-harvest engineering, washing, polishing, water recycling and complete line design.

Together, we can combine global engineering experience with local sales, service, parts and project support. For a customer, that local capability is extremely important because the relationship continues well beyond the purchase order.

What are the most popular offerings for potato and vegetable packing shed operations and why? The Vege-Polisher remains one of the best-known Wyma machines because it improves washing and finish while allowing the brush configuration and operating intensity to be matched to the crop.

Wet Hoppers are also highly relevant because one machine can provide gentle receiving, soaking, pre-cleaning, buffer storage and controlled feeding into the line.

Water-treatment equipment is attracting increasing interest because water and waste affect several parts of the business at once. Cleaner recycled water can support washing performance, reduce freshwater demand and help operators manage discharge and soil more effectively.

Vertical Bin and Bag Fillers are valuable where the objective is to fill

continued on pg. 12

"A Wisconsin shed handling potatoes grown in stony or heavy soil will have different priorities from a carrot or onion operation."

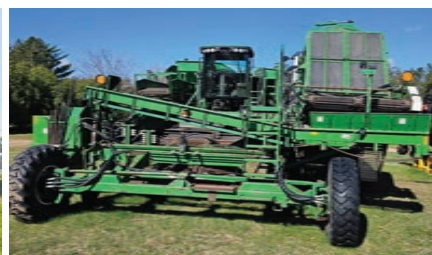
– Leighton Hill



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Interview . . .

continued from pg. 11



storage bins gently and consistently. Debris removers, destoners and dryers may receive less attention visually, but they can have a major effect on uptime, downstream wear and final quality.

Popularity ultimately varies by operation. A Wisconsin shed handling potatoes grown in stony or heavy soil will have different priorities from a carrot or onion operation, so we would not recommend a machine simply because it is popular elsewhere.

Does Wyma Solutions also offer sorting, sizing and grading machines for potatoes, carrots and onions?

Yes, although it is useful to distinguish between sizing, quality grading and manual inspection.

Wyma manufactures mechanical sizing equipment, including Lift Roller Sizers, Screen Sizers and Vibrating Length Sizers. These can separate produce by diameter, overall size, or length, depending on the crop and application.

Wyma also provides inspection equipment and the conveying, spreading and flow-control systems needed to present produce consistently to a grading stage.

For advanced optical quality grading, we can integrate specialist third-party systems into a complete line. Our responsibility can include product presentation, conveyors, support structures, interfaces, controls and downstream distribution.

That integration is critical because even a very capable grader cannot perform consistently if produce arrives in clumps, at an unstable rate or in the wrong orientation.

For potatoes, carrots and onions, the final configuration is selected around crop shape, quality criteria, throughput and the number of grades or destinations required.

Do they incorporate AI, and is AI revolutionizing grading and packing? Artificial intelligence is increasingly important, particularly in optical grading, defect recognition,



Above and Left: Leighton Hill (left) and Mike Coker of Wyma Solutions discuss the attributes of the Wyma Solutions Vege-Polisher™ V2B by Fortifi. Vege-Polishers and Barrel Washers not only subject potatoes and vegetables to controlled washing but also improve retail presentation.

predictive monitoring and robotic handling.

Modern vision systems can assess characteristics such as size, shape, color and visible surface defects far more consistently than traditional manual inspection alone.

However, I would describe AI as an important tool rather than a magic replacement for sound line design. Its performance still depends on lighting, camera presentation, singulation, product cleanliness, reliable data and appropriate operator settings.

If the product is not presented correctly, even an advanced grader will be limited.

AI is revolutionizing specific tasks, especially repetitive inspection and decision-making, but it works best when it forms part of a well-designed production system. The industry will continue moving toward combining human experience with automated measurement and decision support.



The Wyma Solutions Horizontal Debris Remover separates dirt, vines, and other field debris from potatoes.

Can the same be said for bagging and palletizing machines, and does Wyma Solutions offer both? Wyma's broader line-solution capability includes integration of packaging and palletizing as process categories to deliver an overall post-harvest solution.

In North America, Volm has particularly strong capability in packaging produce, including equipment, materials, automation and complete packing-line integration.

continued on pg. 14

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Interview . . .

continued from pg. 13



Above and Right: Absorbent Flat Bed Dryers and Drying Rollers remove surface moisture from potatoes before inspection or packing.



The best result is not necessarily achieved by requiring one manufacturer to build every component. It comes from having

clear overall responsibility for how the machines interact, how product is transferred, how the controls communicate and how the entire

line will be supported.

What separates Wyma Solutions equipment from that of other manufacturers? I believe the main difference is our combination of crop-handling knowledge, engineering depth and full-line integration experience.

We do not look only at whether an individual machine can reach a quoted capacity. We consider what happens to the product at every transfer, how soil and water move through the system, whether one machine creates an unstable feed for the next, how operators will access equipment for cleaning and maintenance, and how the line will behave when crop conditions change.

Wyma also has a strong record in customizing equipment without losing sight of reliability and serviceability. Our objective is to deliver robust equipment that protects product quality, reduces avoidable waste and performs season after season.

Finally, we combine global experience with local North American support



Left: Evenflow hoppers ensure continuous and controlled feed of potato and vegetable crops into a handling line, whether grading potatoes, washing carrots or packing onions.

through Volm. That gives customers access to broader engineering knowledge while retaining a local service and commercial relationship.

Do you also work with processors such as McCain Foods and Lamb Weston? Yes. Wyma works globally with post-harvest customers of all sizes and across a wide range of end-product categories, supporting everything from boutique family operations to large-scale processing sites across multiple continents.

Major potato processors typically have more demanding facility requirements, including hygienic design, documented factory acceptance testing, controls integration, safety standards and structured commissioning.

Wyma is now established as a supply partner to several of the world's leading processors.

Is reusable wastewater one of the most modern evolutions in potato and vegetable sheds, and if so, why? Water reuse is certainly one of the most important areas of development, although vegetable operations have reused processing water in various forms for many years. The modern evolution is the level of control, filtration, automation and separation now available.



The primary drivers are a need to reduce freshwater consumption and to reduce wastewater-discharge volume or improve the quality of discharged water. The priority varies according to local supply costs, discharge requirements, facility location and whether the operation serves the fresh or processed market.

A modern system can remove organic debris, coarse soil and fine settleable solids in stages. The filtered water can then be returned to appropriate

Above: Wyma's Bin & Bag Tipper is an automated multi-purpose tipper that gently empties produce from bags or bins that are too heavy to be manually unloaded. Typically, these Tippers, particularly for big bag unloading, are coupled to a Takeaway Conveyor or Evenflow, but a Wet Hopper or a Creep Feed Hopper is also common.

parts of the washing process.

Water from a filtration and settling system is not automatically potable, so a final fresh, potable rinse and

continued on pg. 16

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Interview . . .

continued from pg. 15

local food-safety requirements still need to be considered.

In addition to water savings, the system can improve line cleanliness, reduce uncontrolled sediment build-up and separate organic material from soil for more manageable disposal.

What about potato peeling machines? Are they mostly for processors?

Peeling is primarily associated with processing operations because those customers are preparing potatoes or other root vegetables for further manufacture, such as French fries, prepared vegetables or other value-added products.

Wyma offers brush and abrasive peeling solutions, including configurations based on our rotary drum technology. The machine and media can be configured to suit the product and desired peeling intensity.

In a fresh-market grading shed, the goal is normally to clean the

potato while protecting its skin and appearance, so peeling is generally not required.

In a processing plant, the commercial discussion changes to yield, peel removal, consistency, water use and the quality required for the next production stage.

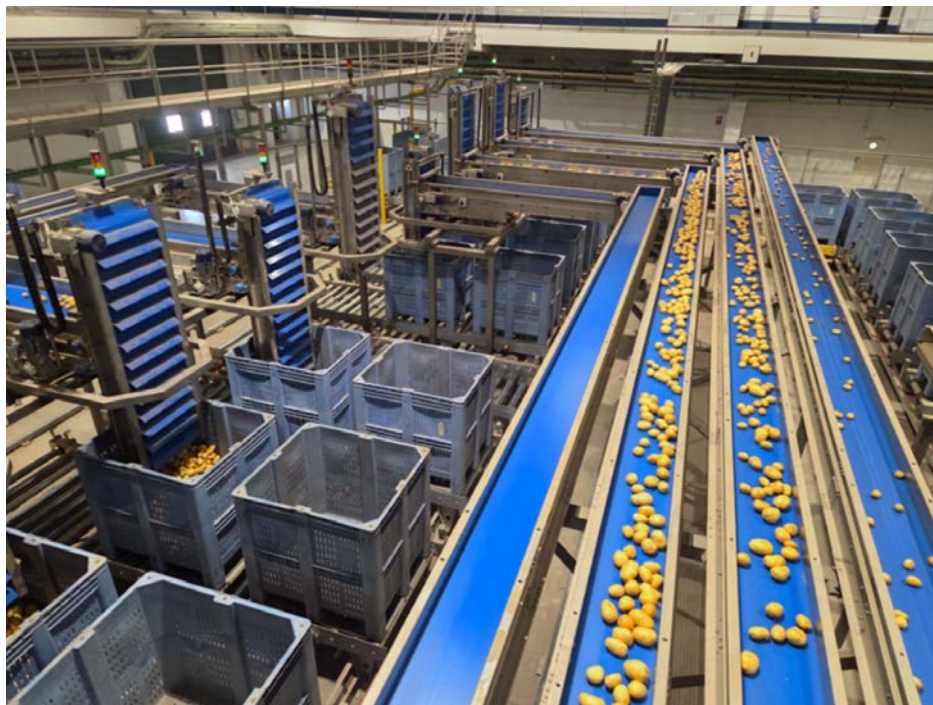
What advice would you give someone hesitant to invest in modern machinery? Start with the business problem rather than with a machine. Identify what is currently limiting the operation. It may be labor availability, inconsistent pack-out, excessive product damage, water use, downtime, inability to meet customer specifications or simply a line that cannot handle future volume.

Then establish a baseline. Understand present throughput, labor requirements, water consumption, maintenance costs, waste, yield and the value of product being downgraded. Without that information, it is difficult to evaluate any proposal properly.



Wyma Vertical Bin and Bag Fillers are designed for gentle, controlled filling.

I also recommend speaking with operators of comparable installations, visiting working sites where possible and considering total cost of ownership rather than purchase price alone.



Leighton Hill says he is enthusiastic about better plant-level automation, remote support, and data visibility. “These tools can make complex potato and vegetable grading and packing lines easier to operate and support,” he notes, “although the controls still need to remain understandable, serviceable and appropriate for the customer’s workforce.”

A lower-priced machine is not necessarily less expensive if it creates more downtime, damages product or restricts future growth.

Modernization does not always require replacing the entire facility at once. A phased plan can address the greatest constraint first while ensuring each investment will fit the longer-term design.

What technological advancements do you see in the future? I expect to see several areas develop together:

- More intelligent optical inspection and grading.
- Better automated singulation and presentation of individual products.
- Wider use of robotics for packing and palletizing.
- Greater access to real-time production, maintenance and quality information.
- Condition monitoring to identify developing mechanical issues earlier.
- Remote diagnostics and support.
- More efficient and more precisely controlled water-treatment systems.
- Controls that optimize whole-line performance rather than operating each machine independently.
- Stronger focus area on hygienic, accessible and easy-to-clean design.

The most valuable advances will be those that make the operation simpler and more predictable. Technology must reduce complexity for the operator, not simply transfer complexity into a different part of the facility.

How do you hope Wyma Solutions is positioned at the forefront of those technologies? Wyma should continue combining practical mechanical engineering with automation, vision, data and water-management expertise.

We do not need to develop every



A modern Wyma Solutions Water Recycling System can remove organic debris, coarse soil and fine settleable solids in stages. The filtered water can then be returned to appropriate parts of the washing process. Water from a filtration and settling system is not automatically potable, so a final fresh, potable rinse and local food-safety requirements still need to be considered.

specialist technology internally. In some areas, the best approach is to work with strong partners and take responsibility for successfully integrating their technology into the complete line.

In other areas, such as washing, polishing, water treatment and product handling, we have the knowledge and experience to lead development directly.

continued on pg. 18

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Interview . . .

continued from pg. 17

Being at the forefront means understanding the customer's actual operating problem, testing new technology under real production conditions and only making performance claims we can support. It also means ensuring new systems remain maintainable and supportable over their full operating life.

How can growers best learn about

upgrading their facilities? I would recommend beginning with a structured site review.

Bring together the people who operate, clean, maintain and manage the line. Their perspectives are often different, and each exposes important constraints.

Review current flow paths,

bottlenecks, drop points, labor-intensive tasks, water movement, recurring maintenance issues and the areas where quality is lost.

Growers should also attend industry events, visit other packhouses, speak with equipment suppliers and request references from operations handling similar crops and soil conditions.

In Wisconsin, Volm provides a strong local starting point. Volm and Wyma can review the existing facility, discuss production objectives and develop options ranging from a targeted machine replacement to a staged upgrade or a completely new line.

Can Wyma Solutions or Volm Companies run customers through a return on investment (ROI) exercise and assist with new facility and system design?

Yes. For an ROI exercise, we can help identify the areas that should be measured, including labor, throughput, product yield, grade-out, product damage, water use, waste handling, downtime and maintenance.

The customer still needs to provide accurate operating and financial information because labor rates, product values, seasons and utility costs vary significantly.

From those inputs, different scenarios can be compared, including doing nothing, making a targeted upgrade or investing in a new line.

For new facilities, Wyma and Volm can support process planning, equipment selection, concepts, layouts, product-flow analysis, line integration, controls, installation and commissioning.

The aim is to consider the full operation early, including access, cleaning, storage, forklift movement, utilities, waste streams and future expansion. This reduces



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the risk of designing the building first and later trying to force the process into it.

What do you hope for the future of Wyma Solutions? I hope Wyma continues to grow as a trusted long-term partner to growers, packers and processors, not simply as a machine supplier.

That means continuing to improve our core equipment, developing practical new technology and strengthening our ability to support customers locally.

In North America, I would like to see the Wyma and Volm relationship continue to mature so customers receive one connected experience from the first site discussion through design, installation, training, parts and ongoing service.

Most importantly, I hope we continue to help customers recover more saleable product from each harvest, reduce unnecessary water and product loss, and build operations that are safer, more efficient and ready for the next generation.

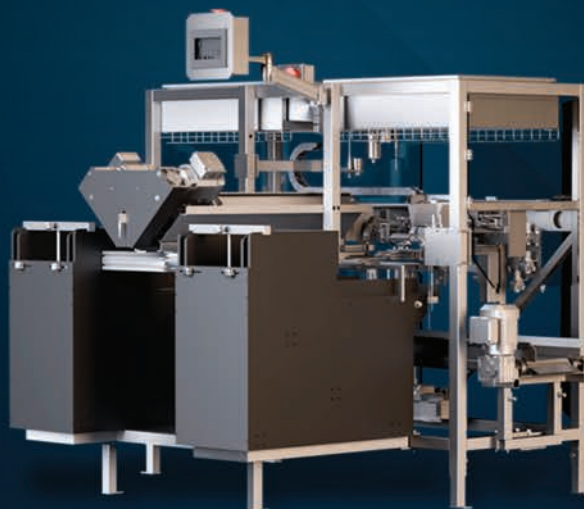
Anything you'd like to add? I would encourage growers not to wait until their existing line becomes an emergency.

A good upgrade begins with understanding where value is being lost today and where the business wants to be in five or ten years. That conversation can happen well before either a final budget or equipment decision is required.

I would also emphasize that technology is only one part of a successful project. The best outcomes come from combining equipment, operators, maintenance, process knowledge and strong local support.

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