Silent Shade PLANTING COMPANY

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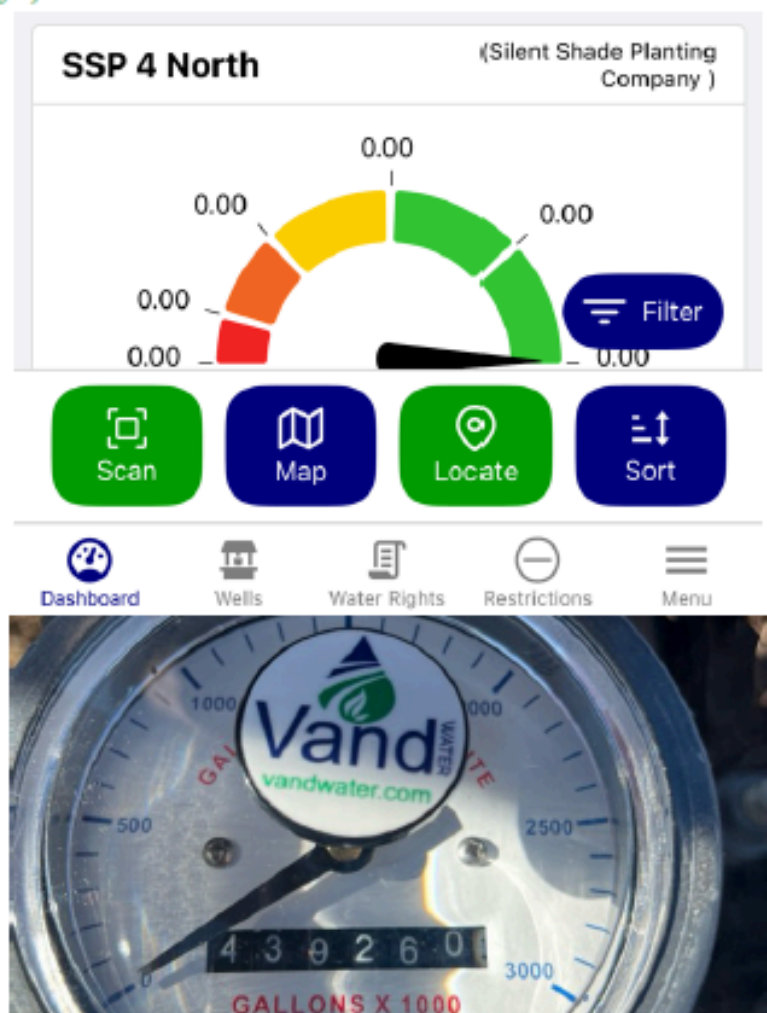# VANDWATER: A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO ENHANCE VOLUNTARY WATER METERING

Jeremy Jack

Earlier this year, I got a call from Chase Larsen, a farmer friend of mine from Belleville, Kansas, about a software program he had developed. I am always open to trying something new—especially when recommended by someone I hold in high regard. But, when it comes to software, I tend to be a bit skeptical. I have seen plenty of tech products come and go over my last twenty years on the farm.

Chase and his family run one of the most innovative and impressive farming operations I have ever seen. So, when he told me about VANDWATER, his water meter tracking software, I paid close attention. Initially, I was not convinced that VANDWATER had a clear role in our Mississippi operation. In Chase's home state of Kansas, water regulations are strict. Farmers have specific allowances of water they can pump, and each well has its own meter tracking water usage. They must regularly report these figures to the state demonstrating compliance. VANDWATER simplifies this process by functioning like a gas gauge in your truck, instantly showing how much water has been used and how much remains available.

In Mississippi, we do not face the same strict regulatory environment yet—and we want to keep it that way. Our state has done a good job promoting voluntary stewardship to protect our water resources for future generations. On our farm, while we do not meter every well, we participate actively in Mississippi's voluntary meter program, where growers commit about 20% of their wells for research purposes.

After having multiple conversations with Chase about the ease and accuracy of his program, he convinced me to give VANDWATER a trial run. Essentially, VANDWATER is an app on your smartphone using simple Apple AirTag technology (screenshot above). When you want to record a meter reading, you just tap your phone to a small token attached to the meter (pictured below screenshot). The app immediately recognizes the meter, prompts you to enter the reading, and then asks for a quick photo for verification. Done. It's as easy as sending a text.

Where VANDWATER truly shines, however, is in the reporting capabilities behind the scenes. The mo-

ment the data is entered, the software automatically calculates your water usage and organizes the information in virtually any format you could imagine. I'll be honest—I'm rarely impressed by farm-based software layouts, but this was different. It was evident that the program was developed by someone who understands farming firsthand.

After using VANDWATER for a season, my skepticism has turned to enthusiasm. While I initially did not think we had a strong need for this type of program, it has become clear that VANDWATER could significantly enhance our voluntary metering efforts and help us benchmark irrigation practices across our farm and even within our region. While technology alone will not solve all of our challenges, a well-designed solution like VANDWATER, built by farmers for farmers, can certainly multiply our efforts to use water resources more efficiently and responsibly. You can learn more about VANDWATER by going to vandwater.com, and you can learn about Chase's farm at bestifor.com.