



JOE

HURST

*Man with the
Farm Machines*

STORY: LAURA GUTSCHKE
PHOTO: ARTIE LIMMER

JOE HURST ('79, B.S. IN

agriculture education) knows the family business from the ground up, starting at age 8 when he swept the floors at Hurst Farm Supply Inc., where his father, L.J., was a stakeholder and manager.

“My responsibility was to do that (sweep floors) every morning before school. On Saturdays, I mopped the bathrooms and the building from the storefront to the back,” said Hurst.

In 1955, L.J. Hurst bought a stake in a farm supply company and John Deere dealership located in a 2,800-square-foot building in downtown Lorenzo and changed its name to Hurst Farm Supply. When the senior Hurst died in 1986, Joe Hurst and his brother, Terry ('75 B.S. in mechanized agriculture), bought their father's share.

Today, Joe Hurst is general manager and secretary treasurer of the agriculture supply corporation that has five total stakeholders. The company has grown from the original store in Lorenzo to three more dealer locations and a parts store on the South Plains. Volume sales have increased 25 times in the last 20 years.

It has especially dominated the cotton stripper market, annually accounting for about 20 percent of all sales of that equipment for John Deere. In 1995, the company sold almost 50 percent of all John Deere cotton strippers.

Hurst attributes the growth to a company-wide commitment by its employees, managers and supportive stakeholders to customer service, a philosophy evident in the company's mission statement: “We are determined to be a company of High Touch in this age of High Tech.”

“This means that we recognize that our greatest asset is our customer. We are committed to treating them with courtesy and respect at all times, recognizing that we are selling much more than agricultural products or providing services or repair. We are selling the idea that we are in a partnership with our customers that maximizes their success. When they succeed, we succeed,” said Hurst.

The company is frequently ranked in the top 5 percent of all John Deere dealerships in customer satisfaction, said Craig McDonald, president of Hurst Farm Supply and a partner since 1969.

To better serve customers, Hurst Farm Supply maintains a \$1.5 million parts inventory. When a farmer stops work in the fields to track down an implement part, he is losing valuable time. Having the part he needs without delay is critical, said Hurst.

“We strive to have a 98 percent fill rate at our parts counter. When people walk in, we want to have the part they need,” said Hurst.

“At the time we were expanding our parts department, John Deere wanted their dealers to lower inventories. I went directly opposite. When a cus-

tomers goes around to two or three places before he comes to us and finds that we have the part, next time he needs something, he comes to us first.”

The service department staff also aims for short turnarounds on repairs and maintenance of tractors, cotton strippers and other implements to reduce customers' down times, said Hurst.

And, they service tractors from the latest high-tech models utilizing Global Positioning Systems to ones decades old.

WHEN PEOPLE WALK IN, WE WANT TO HAVE THE PART THEY NEED

“The average age of a tractor in use today is 20 years, so that means some are 40 years old. We still take care of them too,” Hurst said.

FOLLOWING FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Hurst is one of six brothers born to L.J. and his wife, Grace, who graduated from Texas Tech University in 1949 with a degree in music education. He participated in 4-H and FFA while attending high school and did odd jobs around the farm supply store, which in 1963 had moved from a building in town to outside of Lorenzo on the highway. Hurst learned to drive a tractor—a John Deere model 4320—his freshman year when he worked on McDonald's farm.

At age 18, Hurst married his high school sweetheart, Christy Smith ('84, B.S., human development & family studies), and the two enrolled at Texas Tech.

While in school, Hurst worked at a Lubbock lumberyard full-time, and later back at the farm supply store. Twelve days after he received his degree, he and Christy's first son, Jerred, was born.

Hurst taught for one year in the Roosevelt Independent School District, as a vocational agriculture teacher, before he returned to the family business for good. Hurst worked in the parts department before transferring to sales. Christy taught school in Idalou for 10 years.

“My Dad ran the business great for the times he was in. But, times change, and we had to get more aggressive and innovative in our business strategies to obtain the market share we desired,” said Hurst.

SETTING NEW PATHS

Hurst Farm Supply initiated a new marketing program in 1988 that eventually helped them be the top seller of John Deere cotton strippers in the United States.

The plan involved letting a farmer trade in a cotton stripper for a new one every year. The farmer could pay interest for about 40 days on a new machine and then trade it in instead of sitting idle and adding to his expenses the rest of the year. Hurst Farm Supply then marketed the traded-in cotton strippers to other customers.

The corporation also has grown through the purchase of other farm supply companies. The two locations of Bryant Farm Supply in Lubbock and Slaton were acquired in 1991. In 2004, Hurst Farm Supply bought Thompson Implement in Abernathy.

Hurst Farm Supply's trade area is in the heart of cotton country and includes Lubbock, Crosby,



Dickens, Lynn, Garza and Hale counties. Their expertise in cotton strippers is known throughout the South. The company also has sold equipment to customers overseas, including Australia, South America and Greece.

Hurst also developed an aggressive tractor marketing strategy which involved the use of a rental fleet. Currently, Hurst Farm Supply main-

tains a rental fleet of about 70 late model tractors which creates cash flow, a good selection of inventory, and an avenue to have a more competitive price in the retail market.

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGY

Two noteworthy advancements in farm equipment in recent decades were John Deere's introduction of the enclosed, air-conditioned tractor cab in 1973 and the eight-row cotton stripper in 1987 to replace the four- and six-row models. Although, these two advancements drastically changed the farming practices, Hurst believes that John Deere has introduced an idea that will totally revolutionize the future of farming. This new

CHAMPION FOR THE AMERICAN FARMER

Despite his dislike for publicity, Joe Hurst spoke during the Texas Farm Bill Forum in October 2005 at Texas Tech University, which allowed producers and other interested parties to give their input on the next farm bill to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and other officials.

Here are excerpts of his remarks from the forum transcript:

Since the enactment of this 2002 Farm Bill, we are finally seeing some excitement in the agricultural industry that was lost for many, many years. Young farmers are now—even though it's difficult—they're now given the opportunity to stay on the farm. All farmers are now able to make projections in paying their financial structures, and they're able to update the lower end of their equipment, which helps us as a John Deere dealer, but it also enables the farmer to have more efficient equipment and also operate by meeting the safety standards of this day and time. Never before has this Farm Bill delivered such a consistent farm policy that has enabled the flexibility of products and stability of support as our current 2002 Farm Bill. This program has benefited my business, as well as other businesses connected to agriculture. And, as statistics show, these benefits are injected straight into the local economies, which in turn reaches operations that are outside our local region.

Hurst later explained that most people do not understand that farm subsidies do not benefit just the farmer, but also their vendors, their communities and just about every American who buys clothing or food.

"The U.S. farmers are the most efficient producers in the world. For what they get paid for their products, they have to be," said Hurst.

**TWELVE DAYS AFTER HE
RECEIVED HIS DEGREE, HE
AND CHRISTY'S FIRST SON,
JERRED, WAS BORN**

technology is what Deere refers to as AMS (Agricultural Management Solutions).

AMS involves a variety of products and services utilizing the use of the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technology. Just a few of these are guidance applications, Auto Trac Assisted Steering (hands free), yield mapping, aerial imaging, and soil testing. All of these new innovations lead to more efficient and productive farming practices. Hurst assures that the term prescription farming will be a common term in the near future and that Hurst Farm Supply will be actively involved in this advancement.

“We’ve been very aggressive in bringing AMS to our customers,” Hurst said. “Dealers have either

for the Slaton store, and Kelly Hurst works in the parts department at the Lorenzo store while attending Texas Tech.

In addition, Kerry Hurst, Terry’s twin brother, is a retired Methodist minister who manages the Lubbock store.

However, many of the 85 people employed with Hurst Farm Supply are not related to the Hurst family, and the company’s low employee turnover speaks volumes about how Joe Hurst runs the company day-to-day, said company president Craig McDonald.

“One of the things Joe is really good at is managing people,” said McDonald. “Almost all of our



really gotten on board with it, or they’ve shied away from it because they don’t have the people who can manage it. We do.”

His second son, Jay (’04, B.A. in psychology), oversees the AMS department for Hurst Farm Supply, including implementing the technology, setting up a network of towers, and helping farmers learn how to incorporate it into their operations.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Both of Joe Hurst’s two sons are part of the company now. Jerred (’02, B.S. in management information systems) works in the sales department in Lorenzo and runs the IT department. (He also has his own Web site design company, JCH Solutions.)

In addition, Terry Hurst’s three sons work for Hurst Farm Supply: Jonathan Hurst is a salesman in the Lorenzo store, Casey Hurst is parts manager

employees come to us as kids and grow up with us. We send them to John Deere School and invest in lots of training for them. We have a very Christian organization as well.”

Joe Hurst shuns the spotlight. He doesn’t have a bio page on the company Web site listing his education, experience and accomplishments. However, a box in the closet is full of John Deere awards, especially for his management skills.

“He’s the best in the US, without a doubt, and I’m not just saying that because he’s a partner. He’s been recognized by John Deere several times for his management of the company,” said McDonald. “He’s an outstanding guy, and I don’t think I know of a more honest person.”

FACT FILE

Family: Joe and Christy have two children, Jerred and Jay. Jerred and his wife, Jennifer (’03, B.S. in human development and family studies), have one son, Noah. Jay and his wife, Kim (’04, B.S. in Psychology).

Community Support: Hurst Farm Supply has supported Women’s Protective Services for several years by assisting in donating a tractor annually for a fund-raising raffle. In addition, they also have made contributions and vigorously support the American Museum of Agriculture in Lubbock.

Free Time: While their children were growing up and raising show animals, Joe and Christy traveled to stock shows. They continue to enjoy spending time with their family, especially their grandson.

Source of Success: “My family and my business have been very blessed because of our savior Jesus Christ. God is a part of this company,” said Hurst.