

Sponsored Content: Success in Shortline Machinery

www.farm-equipment.com/articles/15211-shortline-veterans-in-illinois-stands-by-values-into-third-generation



Shortline Veterans in Illinois Stands by Values into Third Generation

The second longest distributor for Art's Way also leads in equipment sales.

[Jen Bradley \(/authors/262-jen-bradley\)](/authors/262-jen-bradley)

February 22, 2018

J.R. Harris says even after his dad had passed in 1990, the decision to keep his namesake for the family business, J.O. Harris Sales, was one that didn't take much discussion. To-

J.O. Harris Sales

Founded:
1934

day, J.R.'s son, Jay, is the third generation heading the shortline dealership in Alexander, Ill.

J.O. began in the industry in 1934, combining his farming knowledge with something J.R. says he was "real familiar with" – equipment. At first, the business was focused on selling used equipment and mainly corn planters, a product they still sell a lot of today.

It was in 1981 that Art's Way products made their way onto the J.O. Harris Sales lot, just nine years after then 20-year-old J.R. joined the business full time. His brother, Andy, who passed away in October 2017, was also a big part of the company, in charge of service and repair. J.R.'s focus was parts and sales.

J.O. Harris Sales is now the second-longest dealer for the manufacturer, but also their largest volume one. J.R. says feed grinder mixers and rollermills are the dealership's top-selling Art's Way products. They were familiar with the product from the family farm and when their personal dealer died, the fit was perfect for the family's growing equipment business.

Location:

Alexander, Illinois

Owners:

J.R. and Jay Harris

Employees:

20

Primary Lines:

No majors

Secondary Lines:

Art's Way, Demco, Haybuster

The

Success in Shortline Machinery

series highlights the best practice strategies employed by top farm equipment dealers to promote and sell shortline equipment. It is brought to you courtesy of

[Art's Way Manufacturing \(http://www.artsway-mfg.com/\)](http://www.artsway-mfg.com/)

More from this series

(/topics/2201-success-in-shortline-machinery)

Art's Way Manufacturing (<http://www.artsway-mfg.com/>)

is a proud Iowa manufacturer of specialized ag equipment including grinder mixers, hay/forage equipment, bale processors, manure spreaders, and land engaging products. Built on a 60 year tradition of quality, we have recently implemented our Continuous Improvement program. If you are seeking to grow in 2018 with Art's Way's quality products and service, please contact our Customer Service Center for your area representative at 712.864.3131 ext. 1 (tel:(712)%20864-3131) or via email at marketing@artsway-mfg.com (mailto:marketing@artsway-mfg.com).



(<http://www.artsway-mfg.com/>)

Pick a Reliable Partner

They don't sell a primary line, keeping solely with shortlines. Many are made in neighboring Iowa, but overall, J.R. says they sell probably from 50 manufacturers in the states, Canada and overseas.

This long-time equipment dealer says the benefit of picking a reliable partner cannot be understated, and that in the equipment business, parts means profit and happy customers. "They still offer parts for products built back in the 1960s and 70s," J.R. says about Art's Way. He says this is less likely to be seen with major lines, who may not want to hassle with shortline equipment.

"Art's Way has always treated me fair and personal," J.R. adds. "You couldn't ask for any better ownership than that family. They treat me right and I stay with them." He says the staff is always willing to help solve any problems and their relationship, like many of the other shortlines he sells, has developed into one that has been mutually beneficial for decades.

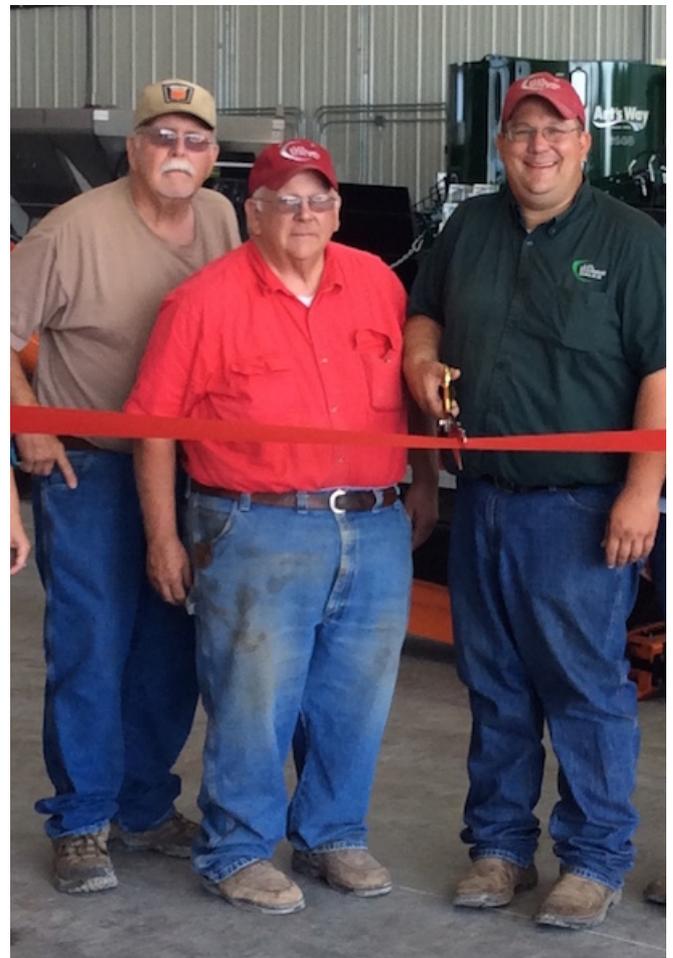
When it comes to picking a shortline manufacturer to represent, J.R.'s advice is to identify a quality product, a company which offers parts and that stands by their manufacturing, and also one that has a representative you can count on. "We have excellent reps that take care of us, call on us, make things work when we need them to," he says.

J.R. says the close relationship he values with Art's Way has also been cultivated with people from other brands J.O Harris Sales carries, such as Haybuster and Demco.

"I know the people on the loading dock to the part's department at Art's Way, most of them by first name," he says with a laugh. J.R. makes the trip a few times a year and says that it's so important to stay in touch with everybody, in person, the old-fashioned way.

Knowing a company will weather the ups and downs with you is something J.R. says he has valued over time. "If you hit a slump, you have to ride through it and know times will be good again," he adds. "Have a positive attitude."

Market Share



J.R., Andy and Jay Harris

J.R. says that Art's Way was a logical fit because of the products' simplicity and reliability. "I think they are well-built machines," he adds. "Parts are readily available, and Art's Way has been a good company to stand behind their products throughout the years."

"We're active grain farmers today, which is another good thing," J.R. says. "We use a lot of these products ourselves, so we know what we like and works the best. We've got our own testing crew out here!"

The majority of their customer base is located within a 50-mile radius of the Illinois location, but J.R. is quick to say that the times have changed, and so have they. His son sells quite a bit of equipment to Idaho and Utah, as well as south into Kentucky and Tennessee. J.O. Harris Sales even has an international reach into the Ukraine, selling them mostly grinder/mixers. "You can't just stay home and sell feed grinders anymore, with the changing market needs," he adds.

The basic process of shortline equipment sales, hasn't changed, however. "Know the farmers you deal with," J.R. advises. "See what they expect and want the machines to do for them." He likes to let them try it out for a bit, and are happy when they find a product that is well built and reasonably priced.

Business Philosophy

When it comes to business philosophy in the shortline business, J.R. says it's pretty simple: "Treat customers like you want to be treated." As a smaller operation with about 20 employees today, he says is a philosophy that his son, Jay, and daughter-in-law, Mary Beth, carry on as they take the helm of the operation.

He adds that being a shortline dealer afford the team a great opportunity to truly know a customer and their needs. With many different options, J.R. says he knows not all sizes fits one, and one brand may be what the person needs vs. another. Recently, he's seen this trend with the vertical tillage equipment J.O. Harris carries. "We have different options and can provide a personalized approach," he adds.

Affordable prices. Personal service. J.R. knows treating customers well is the lifeline to sustaining a family shortline business. "I just offer them a good product at a reasonable price," he says, explaining that his wife, daughter and son all grew up the same way he did.

The business' physical footprint has grown over the years too. The office used to be run from the family home with a small, single shop outside, but now includes an office/parts room with a 60 x 80- foot shop built in the early 2000s and then an 80 x 200-foot shop built in 2015. J.R. says two other farm building were also converted into shops for the dealership's service division.

In the future, J.R. says they plan to keep working with the quality and service-driven shortline brands they currently carry, and continue to provide service as needed. "We'll keep on rolling like that, for the time," he concludes.



J.R. and Barb Harris

