



Charlie Hart, Hart's Seed Co Wethersfield, CT

Charlie Hart's family business has thrived for over 120 years, when so many others have gone the way of the Ford Edsel. Here is his story:

Hart's business model is twofold.

Hart's has two divisions:

1. The wholesale division supplies dealers, seed companies, and farmers with bulk vegetable and flower seeds. It also supplies the turf market with equipment, materials, and seeds.
2. The packet seed division assembles displays of seed packets for retail sales, and keeps them well stocked.

Seeds are sold to individual gardeners through retail outlets, and via The Online Greenhouse, accessible from Hart's website.



Left to right: William, Charles, Jim, and Robert

The business remains all in the family.

Charlie Hart started by sweeping the floors, learning every phase of the seed business from the bottom up. His great-grandfather, Charles C. Hart, started Hart's Seeds in 1892, and passed it down to his sons. The four sons, in turn, each selected a family member to be involved. "My father was one of four cousins who ran the business," Charlie explained. "Over the years, every kid in the Hart family has worked in the company for some period of time. Now that I've retired, my two sons manage different parts of the

business, and my 16-year old grandson has just started to work at Hart's. Jim Harris, the company president, is a 4th generation relative by marriage."

Hart's rocks the Cradle!

Just as the Hart family is entrenched in the seed business, their hometown of Wethersfield, Connecticut is steeped in the seed tradition. Known as the "Cradle of American Seed Companies," the town was home to seven different seed companies for a period of time in the 19th century. Good management, a strategy for succession, and a strong family work ethic (Hart's grandfather and great uncle stayed active in the business into their 90s) enabled Hart's to thrive as others consolidated or otherwise lost their identities.



Hart's believes in giving back to the community.

As a venerable elder in the seed industry, Hart's has played a part in shaping it. The business is a founding member of the Home Garden Seed Association and the Atlantic Seed Association, and remains an active participant in these and multiple other trade and marketing groups. It is the Hart family's way to take an active role in community affairs, and do its part to ensure that the entire seed industry thrives.

Charlie's words of wisdom:

"Everything evolves," Charlie replied when I asked him how Hart's has maintained its success for five generations (and counting). "At one time the competition was mostly from other seed companies of similar size, and government regulations were much looser. We produced some of our own seed, which gave us a competitive advantage." In the modern seed business much of the production happens overseas, and Hart's prospers by knowing the industry inside and out, keeping abreast of regulations, and providing great customer service.



You don't get to be a five-generation survivor without an ample measure of common sense. This is evident in Charlie's advice to the gardening public:

- Plant the vegetables your family likes to eat. Try a few varieties to see which perform well, and then plant the best of them next season.
- Plant flowers that will make good bouquets.
- Buy seed from reputable sources.

For the key to success, he offers this tidbit: "We don't worry about what they do. We worry about what we do."

Now *those* are words to live by.