

Profile from the Field

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Niche Nuts

Project Title: Niche Nut Processing Project:
 Collaborating to Establish Nut Crop Production,
 Processing and Marketing in the North Central
 Region

Coordinator: Kurt Belser

Location: Albany, Ohio

SARE Grant: \$22,493

Duration: 2012-2013

**To read the full project report, go to
www.sare.org/projects and search for
 project number FNC12-847.**



Kurt Belser is working to grow and wild harvest more nuts like hazelnuts in Ohio. Photo by Chris Battaglia.

Belser's facility will pay prices that will create an incentive for landowners to manage their nut producing woodlots and plant cultivars in their fields; which, in turn, will promote ecologically sound farming practices such as forest farming, alley-cropping, and silvopasture.

So far, Belser has established relationships with the Northern Nut Growers Association (NNGA), the Ohio Nut Growers Association (ONGA), and Greg Miller at the Empire Chestnut Company. With his project partners, he hosted a grafting workshop for black walnuts and hickory nuts at Solid Ground Farm, an educational farm. He has tested machinery on and off site, provided educational material at events, and has recruited growers interested in nut production.

"By initiating growers and landowners into further cultivation of perennial forest products, we hope to be a driving force behind sustaining this staple food source," said Belser.

Kurt's presentation at the 2014 Farmers Forum, can be viewed online through NCR-SARE's YouTube playlist. Visit www.youtube.com/NCRSAREvideo and search "Kurt Belser" to watch it.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, America's top nut producers are California, producing nearly 90% of tree nuts in America; Georgia, New Mexico, and Texas, raising 75% of America's pecan crop; and Oregon, raising the majority of America's hazelnut crop.

Kurt Belser is the owner of the The Wingnuttery in Albany, Ohio, where he grows, produces, and wild harvests hickory nuts, black walnuts, chestnuts and hazelnuts. In 2012, he received an NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant to create a prototype regional-scale nut production, processing, and value-adding system in Southeast Ohio. His goal is to create a regional-scale nut processing facility that will be replicable for other areas in the region, and wherever nuts are a viable crop.

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