

## They're Making Ramen Noodles In South Dakota

Albany Farms manufactures and sells ramen noodles made from US-grown wheat. Albany Farms is based in California, but the company's Twisted Noodles are produced in a Belle Fourche, S.D., processing plant. The company began as an importer before transitioning to making its own products and converted the million-dollar plant for this purpose.

Specializing in ramen has a lot of appeal. The noodles are incredibly versatile and can be eaten as-is directly from the package, or they can be customized into a variety of dishes with limitless add-ins. It's even possible to branch out beyond soup to create ramen-based casseroles, granola, and desserts.

To date, Albany Farms is the only ramen plant in South Dakota. The first Twisted Noodles were made in August 2022, and production has scaled up to over 350,000 individual units per factory shift. Now, a factory that once had two workers employs well over 100.

Unlike most instant noodle companies, Albany Farms aims to source all the ingredients domestically. Currently, Twisted Noodles are made from Kansas-grown wheat, though all vegetables and spices are imported. Using American-made



**Albany Farms is the only ramen plant in South Dakota and has over 100 employees.**

noodles was the main objective, and they hope to eventually work primarily with wheat farms in South Dakota.

Current flavor options include beef, chicken, veggie, and shrimp, sold in cups and flat packages. They're priced around \$0.80 per 2.25 oz cup of noodles and can be found at various retailers, including Target, Walmart Canada, H.E.B, and Dollar Tree.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Albany Farms, 1125 Bonanza St., Belle Fourche, S.D. 57717 ([www.albanyfarms.com/twisted-noodles](http://www.albanyfarms.com/twisted-noodles)).



**Hammons Products shells over 25 million lbs. of black walnuts each year and operates in 13 states.**

## He Set Up A Nut Hulling Business

Matt Folkert is nuts for black walnuts. The young entrepreneur operates a hulling station on his uncle's farm that is one of a network of hulling stations contracted with Hammons Products. Folkert buys the nuts from his customers and then hulls them for Hammons Products, which is the only black walnut processor in the U.S. The company shells out around 25 million lbs. of black walnuts each year.

"I'm in my second year, and business has been pretty good," reports Folkert mid-season. "I learned a lot the first year, and things are now going smoothly. I made sure I had space for full pallets."

Hammons operates in 13 states, anywhere there is a good quantity of black walnuts, according to Alan Stauffacher, Hammons Products. The home plant is in Missouri, where picking walnuts and selling them is a heritage sideline. Stauffacher's family has been doing just that for three generations.

"We try to make operating a hulling station as pain-free as possible," he says. "We provide the machines, bags, and freight to ship the nuts to us. The operator brings in the business and disposes of the debris. They need to be someone interested in harvesting black walnuts and willing to get their hands dirty."

Hammons Products pays a commission to hullers. While it can vary, this year it's 6¢/lb. "We like our operators to be able to do 100,000 lbs. of nuts in the 5 to 6-week season," says Stauffacher. "We had one location do 600,000 lbs. of black walnuts last year. In the past, we've had people do close to a million lbs. of nuts in a single season."

Folkert's customers also get paid by the pound of hulled nuts. This year the company paid 16¢, but Stauffacher says it can vary from 16 to 20¢/lb. depending on the cost of processing and the quality of the nuts the previous year.

Getting paid for black walnuts is what got Folkert into the business. When he was young, picking the nuts in their hulls was

how he paid for things like video games. "At the time there was a guy nearby who ran a buying station," says Folkert. "He stopped, and no one else picked up the business. I sent the company a query, and here I am."

Hulling black walnuts is a dirty business as the green hull stains hands. People harvesting nuts for their own use usually have a favorite way to separate the hull from the nut. YouTube is full of methods. The mechanical huller from Hammons Products is the fastest and easiest there is.

"The only thing we have to watch for is sticks," says Folkert. "It chews right through little twigs and leaves."

Folkert notes that his challenge the first year was simply getting the word out that he was open for business. He's the only Hammons operator in Minnesota. He posted notices around the area and placed an article in the local newspaper.

"There were a surprising number of people who had contacted Hammons and were referred to me," says Folkert. "I know word of mouth will take time."

He notes that many of his customers pick up fallen nuts every year. Instead of dumping them in a ditch, they can sell them through him. Some, he adds, get serious and pick up everything they can find, whether on their lawn or in nearby woods.

"If you have walnut trees around you, mowing in late summer and picking up fallen branches can make the harvest easier," he advises. "It still requires physical labor. Machines like the Nut Wizard (Vol. 45, No. 3) can make the job easier."

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## Skull Cleaning Service Offers Permanent Preservation

Lauren Hull of La Grande, Ore., has made a professional business of cleaning and degreasing skulls and antlers.

As a child, Hull was fascinated by the intricacy of nature and all of life's moving parts. She first worked with bones for a school art project, cleaning them with the help of dermestid beetles. A few years later, she completed a senior art exhibit that was comprised of bones from different animals, combined into unique combinations to create new species. "Most of these pieces were intricate," says Hull. "A taxidermist happened to attend the show and recognized that I was using dermestid beetles. He asked if I might clean a deer skull for him, which was the start of this crazy journey."

Also known as larder beetles, leather beetles, carpet beetles, and carrion beetles, dermestid beetles are known for thriving on carcasses and typically arrive on them about a week after death. They are used in forensic entomology and criminal investigations to determine the time of death.

At first, Hull only beetled skulls for her taxidermy connection's business, but word got out about her aptitude. Soon, she was getting requests to beetle other people's game animals. "I quickly realized that this could become a serious business and that I needed to learn how to clean skulls properly," she says.

Today, Hull maintains about ten beetle colonies, each containing millions of beetle larvae (the ones who do most of the work). The colonies sit in plastic totes on the floor in a room kept at 80 degrees year-round. "I water them with a mister and keep them fed all year. Trappers bring me skulls, so I have an endless supply of coyote skulls to keep them going." While she aims to keep the colonies separate, escapees are common and must be closely monitored.



**Hull maintains about 10 beetle colonies that help to clean skulls.**

If the beetles lack decaying flesh, they will eat carpet, wood, and even concrete. They can even chew through Hull's plastic storage totes, requiring her to replace them every few years. "There's enough beetles that I'm sure if a horse walked into my beetle house and died, they could turn the thing into a skeleton in no time!"

While beetleing lays the groundwork, it's barely half the process. Hull soon learned that degreasing skulls is critical for getting the bones to turn white. Otherwise, they become yellowed and greasy after a few months. This requires hot water, a cocktail of chemicals, and plenty of time. Depending on the animal, drawing the grease out completely can take several months. Hull finishes each skull with a whitening treatment and a matte clear coat that seals it against moisture. "This is dirty, smelly work," says Hull. "My process has come a long way since the day I began. I now clean hundreds of skulls a year."

Pricing varies by animal and goes up if the animal is not skinned. Small skulls start at \$65, while moose can be up to \$450. All

heads must be fresh or frozen. Maggots, mold, or rot will incur additional fees. Many customers ship her skulls directly. "Taxidermists from Alaska ship me totes full of skulls," she says. Probably one of the stranger ones I've done is a guy shipped me his dead cat from Florida because he wanted the whole skeleton cleaned and articulated."

Today, Hull primarily advertises through word of mouth and her social media accounts, "Lauren Hull's Skull Cleaning," on Facebook and Instagram. "The name is due to a lack of creativity on my end," says Hull. "But also, I

don't want any confusion about the service I'm providing."

Her advice for new people interested in the skull cleaning business? "Just roll up your sleeves and get used to smelling like a death every day," she laughs. "You will get used to the smell, but your friends and family will not."

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