

## Ben Weber – Completely Nuts

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Completely Nuts. Does that sound like an unusual name for business? Today we'll learn about a young entrepreneur who is involved in several enterprises, but one is focused on a very specific line of products: In fact, the product line is nuts only. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Ben Weber is a young entrepreneur in southeast Kansas. His uncles farm and his father is a Pioneer Seed salesman and has been for 25 years. Maybe Ben got expertise in sales from his father.

First, though, Ben went to Washburn University to play football. Unfortunately, he blew out his shoulder and was unable to play. While in Topeka he met an older couple in the area that had a business selling cinnamon-roasted nuts. During school he helped them sell their products part-time. In 2001, he had the opportunity to buy their equipment from them. Two years later, he purchased another nut company.

Ben put himself through school selling these delicious flavoured nuts and then took the business on the road. When it came time to name the company, he came up with a tongue-in-cheek name, so to speak. He named the company Completely Nuts.

"I'm working for peanuts so I might as well have a fun name," Ben said with a smile. He had a roasting machine, a recipe, weighing scale, and supplies. He mixed cinnamon, sugar, and a splash of vanilla, added the nuts, roasted and cooled them and then hand-weighed them into bags. There are three sizes: Small, medium and large. Eventually he got three different sets of equipment so he could serve three locations simultaneously.

When I say he took the business on the road, I mean that literally. Ben started traveling to malls, festivals, and events to sell the delicious roasted nuts. He sold nuts as far west as Las Vegas and up and down the eastern seaboard. Ben sold the nuts from the Orange Bowl parade down in Miami up to Niagara Falls on the Canadian border. Wow.

One year Ben was selling nuts in a mall in St. Joseph, Missouri during the Christmas season. An attractive young woman bought nuts from him and they got acquainted. Her name was Lara. Sure enough, they fell in love.

"If this doesn't work out financially, at least it worked out socially," Ben said. Ben and Lara got married and eventually they moved back to Ben's rural hometown of Yates Center, Kansas, population 1,586 people. Now, that's rural.

Ben is now an associate in his father's Pioneer Seed sales business while also selling Meridian seed tender wagons and independent crop insurance. He still sells cinnamon roasted nuts but doesn't go on the road as much since he started a family. In fact, Ben and Lara have five children seven years of age or younger: They have girls age seven and five, plus a three year old son and twin boys age seven months. Forgive me for saying so, but life in a household like that might be completely nuts.

Ben Weber takes it all in stride. He enjoyed traveling with the nut business but he is really enjoying being home with his young children. In his traveling days, he had the opportunity to do a lot of sightseeing. Still, he said the greatest highlight of the business was the nice people he had a chance to meet.

Ben started selling his cinnamon roasted nuts at Bass Pro Shop stores and even met the owner of the chain. He has encountered other celebrities along the way as well.

“One day I was selling at a Bass Pro Shop in Dallas when Terry Bradshaw came along,” Ben said. “He bought some nuts and was so nice to pose for pictures with us. Not two days later, along came Deion Sanders and he was the same way.”

Completely Nuts. It seems like an unusual name for a business, but in this case it accurately describes the business’s products. We commend Ben and Lara Weber for making a difference with entrepreneurship and family life in a rural setting, and with a product line that consists completely of nuts.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.