

RAMONA - Subfreezing temperatures couldn't keep Chad Selman and his crew from harvesting a small grove of nearby pecan trees Monday morning. Plenty of the nuts need to be picked, and the Skiatook businessman can't turn down the prices. Pecan growers and harvesters are about halfway through the prime picking season, with Oklahoma on track to produce a crop of 25 million to 28 million pounds, slightly more than the state's average. "But it's the price that's really good," said Selman, whose S&S Pecan Co. harvests nuts on several hundred acres at various places between Ramona and Muskogee. Growers are receiving more than \$1 a pound for native varieties, a strong price in a market that has been somewhat flat in recent years. Improved varieties of pecans fetch even more. Selman sells his pecans to wholesalers, who process the nuts and sell them to retailers and food manufacturers. He said he appreciated this year's crop, despite the average quantity and quality of nuts, because the last two years were severely hampered by bad weather and ice storms that took down branches from many trees. Oklahoma's yields for 2008 and 2009 were 5 million and 20 million pounds of pecans, respectively, according to statistics collected by Oklahoma State University. During an average year, Oklahoma harvesters collect about 18 million pounds of nuts. In northeastern Oklahoma, the pecans are somewhat small because of sparse rainfall during the key growing period from late August to the end of September. Eric Stafne, an assistant professor of fruit crops at OSU, said poor weather in other regions of the country has hurt the 2010 pecan harvest. "Prices are very high this year, and demand is even high, too," he said. Pecan demand is growing partly because overseas markets, such as China, are developing a taste for the buttery nut. The United States and Mexico produce an overwhelming majority of the world's pecans. Stafne said an improving economy was also helping the pecan market. "But I think it's just that supply has been low in the last couple of years, and that makes prices higher," he said. For consumers, market conditions could mean slightly higher prices for pecans, both in

the shell and out. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that pecans in shells are selling for about \$4 a pound, an increase of about 15 percent from a year ago. Oklahoma pecan crops (in pounds) 2006: 17 million 2007: 30 million

2008: 5 million 2009: 20 million 2010: 25 million to 28 million (estimate) Source:

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