

## Peruvian Brazil Nut Producer Inspires Community While Expanding Her Business

By Peru Mission, Lima

**W**hen you think of agricultural products in Peru, you probably consider potatoes or corn. But one Peruvian has made a crop that bears the name of another South American country a success and proven that she can hold her own in a male-dominated industry.

Sara Hurtado is a Brazil nut producer. She has managed a Brazil nut concession (an area of land granted by the government for sustainable use and development)

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since 1984 and served as a union leader for Brazil nut producers in Madre de Dios, a region in the Peruvian Amazon. She recently created a small company that produces candies and desserts made from Brazil nuts.

Being a woman in this male-dominated industry has been challenging. A single mother, Hurtado believes it has strengthened her family. "I am a father and a mother at the same time. My Brazil nut concession has been like a father to my children. It is my livelihood and it has made it possible for me to raise and educate them."

Hurtado works with the Peruvian NGO, Amazon Conservation Association (*Asociación para la Conservación de la Cuenca Amazónica – ACCA*), which, since 2008, has received support from USAID's Initiative for Conservation in the Andean Amazon. ACCA supports the Association of Brazil Nut Producers with Organic Certification and has granted 21 certifications to Brazil nut concessions, including Hurtado's, giving access to quality markets worldwide.

The Brazil nut (*Bertholletia excels*) is one of the few resources derived from the Amazon tropical rainforest that yields significant volumes of production while keeping the forests intact, thus providing valuable opportunities for combining conservation and development.

Brazil nuts are a high energy, nutritious food. The oil extracted from them is used to manufacture soaps, shampoos, hair conditioner, skin moisturizers, and lighting fuels. The empty pods are used as implements and burned to repel insects.

Since management of Brazil nut concessions is largely a male-dominated activity, with only 30% of concessions in Madre de Dios run by women, Hurtado faced an uphill battle in being taken seriously by other nut producers. "When I began to work as a union leader five years ago there was a lot of machismo. People would say that women should tend to domestic matters," she comments.



**Sara Hurtado has created a brazil nut-based line of confections.**

Hurtado was the only woman among seven other union leaders. Their doubts turned to confidence and paved the way for more female leadership. Says Huretado, "As we worked together, they realized that I was just as capable as them, if not more."

Hurtado's operation ensures a livelihood for eight people in her Brazil nut company, Sarita, which specializes in the production of Brazil nut sweets. She's travelled throughout Peru to see how pastries and sweets are made using different ingredients. "I took a pastry course and learned to use shredded coconut. I wondered if I could do the same with Brazil nuts," she explains. Now that I have given Brazil nuts an added value, I have work during the entire year, not just during the three months of harvest."

Her success did not come without a considerable marketing effort. She made it a point to promote her product and to show its value. Her next big leap is into the world of exporting. Hurtado is part of a group of Brazil nut producers near Alegria who have partnered to meet the demands of the export market. She has also formed a group of 19 concession holders who have created a company that successfully obtained organic certifications.

Approximately 1.2 million hectares of Peru's forests produce Brazil nuts, and nearly 900 thousand hectares have been concessioned at present. Each concession is granted for a period of 40 years and requires a management plan that can guarantee the sustainable use and development of the resource.