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GOOD PICKIN'S FOR PUNKINS THIS YEAR

New Jersey Farm Bureau Notes Pumpkin Popularity Extends Agri-Tourism Season

Trenton, NJ (September 15, 2008) – Farmers throughout New Jersey are revving up for fall punkin' pickin,' one of the most fun family outings, going into full swing in mid/late September and continuing through the first frost. New Jersey farmers constantly raise the activity to new heights of agri-tourism, accompanying the pumpkins with hayrides, cider and donuts, corn mazes, Halloween haunts and more. Some pumpkins come with faces pre-painted and some farms hold pumpkin decorating parties for kids to exercise their own creativity.

Pumpkins vary in size and variety, from the smallest pumpkins and gourds to great big jack-o-lantern types, grown on New Jersey farms for both the wholesale and retail markets. The bright orange fruit conveys the autumn, Halloween and Thanksgiving festivities.

“They tend to draw people to our farms, to enjoy fresh air in a rural setting, get into the fields and pick their own pumpkins and apples and get the last fresh vegetables from the harvest,” says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the New Jersey Farm Bureau.

"Pumpkins attract kids to the farm; families want their children to make that important connection between what they eat and where their food comes from. The pumpkin season allows the farm stands to extend their selling times. When people come for the fall activities, they also buy the other produce that's still being picked," he concludes.

Just what is a pumpkin and where does it get its color?

According to the Sci-Tech Encyclopedia: “The term commonly applies to the larger, orange-colored fruit of the *Cucurbita* species...., Although some taxonomists would restrict the term *pumpkin* to the species *Cucurbita pepper* and *C. moschata*, it is also used in referring to *C. mixta*. New Jersey, Illinois, and California are important producing states. A 90-gram portion provides about 1.80grams of dietary fiber and its orange color, from carotene, makes it a rich source of Vitamin A.”

Pumpkins are native to North America, eaten by the Indians who introduced them to the colonists. Probably because they are a late-ripening fruit, they were popular on Thanksgiving tables, either as vegetables or as pies. Pumpkin pie is still ubiquitous on most Thanksgiving tables. The seeds are commonly known as [pepitas](#) and taste delicious roasted and salted.

The Legend of the Halloween Jack-o'-lantern

Throughout the fall, pumpkins adorn home entries as Halloween jack-o'-lanterns, often hollowed out and carved into faces lit up by candles. This custom came to the US in the mid-1800s, with the Irish immigrants. In Ireland, Jack-o'-lanterns had been carved-out turnips, internally lit by candles, to symbolize the plight of a poor Irishman named Jack, who bargained with the devil not to harass him over the cost of a drink. The following Halloween, Jack died and was turned away from Heaven because of his bargain. When he went to Hell, the devil also turned him away, but when Jack complained he couldn't go anywhere because of the darkness, the devil threw him a glowing coal, which Jack put inside a turnip to use as a light – thus was born a Halloween tradition. When the Irish came to America and saw pumpkins, they realized these would make much better jack-o'-lanterns, and pumpkins have served the purpose ever since.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau lists approximately 125 farms throughout the state as growing pumpkins, with the majority of farmers growing them to sell at their own stands or community farmers markets, rather than supplying supermarkets. For farm listings and details, check the "Produce Directory" section of the Farm Bureau website.

For further information, contact the New Jersey Farm Bureau, at The Farmhouse, 168 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608. Phone 609-393-7163; fax 609-393-7072; email mail@njfb.org; website www.njfb.org

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a non-profit member organization of 15,000 farmers and farm-related entities within the Garden State. It is the only organization solely dedicated to representing the grass- roots interests and directives of its members in educating all levels of government and the public on the farm community's policies and positions. The Farm Bureau also takes a lead in seeking out initiatives, activities and ventures to enhance the profitability of producer members and ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason -- our farms.*

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