

Oct. 13, 2008

AgriLife Extension: pumpkin acreage down but plenty of quality pumpkins available

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FLOYDADA – Pumpkin carvers and pie makers won't have to look too hard this season for just the right one because the quality of this year's crop is outstanding, according to a Texas AgriLife Extension Service pumpkin pro.

J.D. Ragland, AgriLife Extension agent in Floyd County, the "Pumpkin Capital of Texas," said this year's yields are average, planted acres are down, prices are high, but the quality is all there.

"The quality is really outstanding this year," Ragland said. "The yields are average at about 20,000 pounds of pumpkins per acre, but the quality is exceptional this year.

"Prices are high due to the simple economics of supply and demand. There are just not as many of them out there," he said. "Ten years ago we were planting 2,500 acres of pumpkins in the county. This year we only have about 750 acres planted."

Ragland said the acreage drop is because everything associated with pumpkin production is expensive, and much of that cost is in irrigation and the extensive hand labor the crop requires.

"Producers have cut down their pumpkin production and concentrated their acres in spots they know will produce high yields of top pumpkins," he said. "The good news for the consumer is that typically means they'll get the top quality product they're paying that higher price for."

Does the drop in acreage mean there might not be enough pumpkins to go around? Not according to Ragland.

"What people don't realize is that a two- or three-acre pumpkin field is a big one and a five-acre field is huge in terms of pumpkin production," he said. "We've got plenty of pumpkins.

"Our main pumpkin season starts going strong about mid-September and stays strong until Halloween. After that, we'll sell a few from Halloween until Thanksgiving," Ragland said.

"My guess is we'll have plenty until Halloween, but we may run short going into Thanksgiving."

Ragland said Floyd County growers mainly raise four pumpkin types. The most popular are the jack-o-lantern pumpkins which average from six to 12 pounds; next come the pie pumpkins at two to four pounds. He said these two pumpkin classes are bringing around 13 cents per pound to the grower which is one of the highest prices he can recall in the last decade.

The other two types produced are the miniature pumpkins which are bringing about \$2 each to the producer and the giant “big macs” that weigh from 100 to 350 pounds and return roughly \$1 per pound to the grower. These two varieties are used almost exclusively for decorating purpose, according to Ragland.

Most of the county’s pumpkins are sold in truckload lots and go to Texas metropolitan areas, though some go to Oklahoma and have even been marketed as far away as Japan in years past, he said.

With the high quality of this year’s crop, Ragland said there’s no reason consumers shouldn’t take home the best.

“First and foremost look for uniformity in shape and brightness of color,” Ragland said. “Then be sure your pumpkin has a big, long, stout stem so you can handle it. That’s really about all you have to look for.”