

Sustainable Pumpkin Production

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The Jones family farm is a 6th generation, 400 acre family farm in southwestern Connecticut. We currently grow strawberries, blueberries, vegetables, wine grapes, Christmas trees and pumpkins. Our goal is to direct market all of these crops to visitors to the farm. We have been growing pumpkins, gourds and winter squash for 25 years. In order to maintain consistent, high quality production of pumpkins, we have found it necessary to rotate our fields and keep our soils healthy. Below are some key points covered in the presentation.

- We plan to rotate away from pumpkins for two years after growing a field. We may grow strawberries, other non-cucurbit vegetables or cover crops such as sudax or buckwheat in the intervening two years.
- All fields are harrowed and seeded to winter rye for winter cover after harvest.
- We grow pumpkins on rolled winter rye. The rye planted the preceding fall is rolled flat in late May and pumpkins are planted throughout June depending on the variety's days to maturity.
- We employ a minimum tillage planting method, depending on the field, it is either zone tilled or planted directly into the rye, all done by hand.
- The rolled rye benefits are weed suppression, soil moisture retention and clean pumpkins. Soil compaction is minimized by the elimination of cultivation. One potential downside to the rye method is rodent damage to ripening fruit and this must be routinely scouted.
- Pollination is critical to fruit set. We have a bee keeper with some hives on our farm, but our observation is that wild bees do most of the pollinating. We are careful with our insecticide usage and try to leave habitat around the farm that ensures a healthy wild bee population.
- Today's customers expect a quality pumpkin with a solid stem. A well planned IPM program focused on disease control is necessary.
- Unique variety selection and presentation are important aspects of our October marketing efforts.