



# Marketing Fall Specialty Crops: Pumpkins

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Fall specialty crops, especially pumpkins, are generating more interest in Kentucky as potential farm income supplements. Unless producers are able to generate local niche markets for fall specialty crop production, they will need to be extremely sensitive to regional demand for such crops. This article will summarize national and regional trends in pumpkin marketing and production for the fall of 2000.

## *Fall 2000 National Production Outlook*

Pumpkin production is down nationally in 2000. According to the national pumpkin outlook in the September 18 edition of *The Packer*, only California will match its 1999 production. The major southern producer, Texas, expects only 60-70% of last year's crop due to drought. Production in Ohio and Michigan is down by 40-75% due to excessive rain which caused late planting and major pollination problems. In the east, Virginia and Pennsylvania report crops 70-75% of 1999 levels.

## **Selected Pumpkin Shipments By State**

Average 1995-99

Source: USDA, *The Packer*

<b>State</b>	<b>1,000 Cwt</b>
California	119.6
Texas	128.8
Washington	42.8
Michigan	39.0
<i>Tennessee</i>	<i>31.4</i>
Missouri	19.4
Illinois	14.2
Pennsylvania	15.6
<i>Ohio</i>	<i>13.7</i>
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>2.2</b>

Kentucky's major regional competitor in pumpkin production is Tennessee. While production is up, pumpkin size is down in Tennessee this year due to

drier temperatures. Prices are also down slightly, due to changes in buying patterns by some of the larger buying chains. Most Tennessee pumpkins will be shipped at eight cents FOB, similar to prices received in Kentucky.

## *Direct Marketing*

Producers have found many ways to bypass pumpkin wholesalers and take pumpkins directly to the consumer. Many pumpkins in the United States are now being produced to be sold at farmers markets, to school groups visiting farms, or in a variety of "entertainment farming" situations.

These types of market niches are widely successful and can add considerable value to pumpkin crops. UK estimates conservative wholesale returns for pumpkins approaching \$500 per acre above variable costs in an ideal production environment assuming a price of \$0.08 per pound. It is not uncommon for producers to double or triple wholesale returns by direct marketing.

However, on-farm direct marketing such as "entertainment farming" opens up a wide variety of legal and financial considerations. These range from liability concerns for farm visitors, zoning considerations, and income classification. Producers considering on-farm niche marketing of fall specialty crops will want to be aware of these kinds of issues. They have recently been summarized in an outstanding resource authored by one of the country's foremost agricultural law experts, Neil Hamilton of Drake University. This resource, *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing* is available from the Drake University Agricultural Law Center.

## *2001 Pumpkin Marketing Outlook*

Unofficial reports from Tennessee indicate rapid expansion there to 4,500 pumpkin acres in 2001.

There is a rapidly growing entertainment farming business in the state, with 11 operations attracting 20,000 visitors in the fall of 2000. These operations use up large volumes of pumpkins, and growers with more than 100 acres of pumpkins are becoming more common in Tennessee.

The expansion may catch up with Tennessee producers. Producers in Kentucky should be especially aware of significant increases in pumpkin and other fall specialty crop production to the south. In addition, there is also a significant research and

vegetable market development effort in southern Ohio.

In summary, there exist adequate markets for current Kentucky pumpkin production. Niche markets and creative marketing can help add considerable value to a pumpkin crop. There is some potential for increased pumpkin production in Kentucky with identification of other markets, but expansion of the pumpkin and other fall specialty crop industries should proceed cautiously and only as market channels are established.